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CHRISTMAS SERMONS

By

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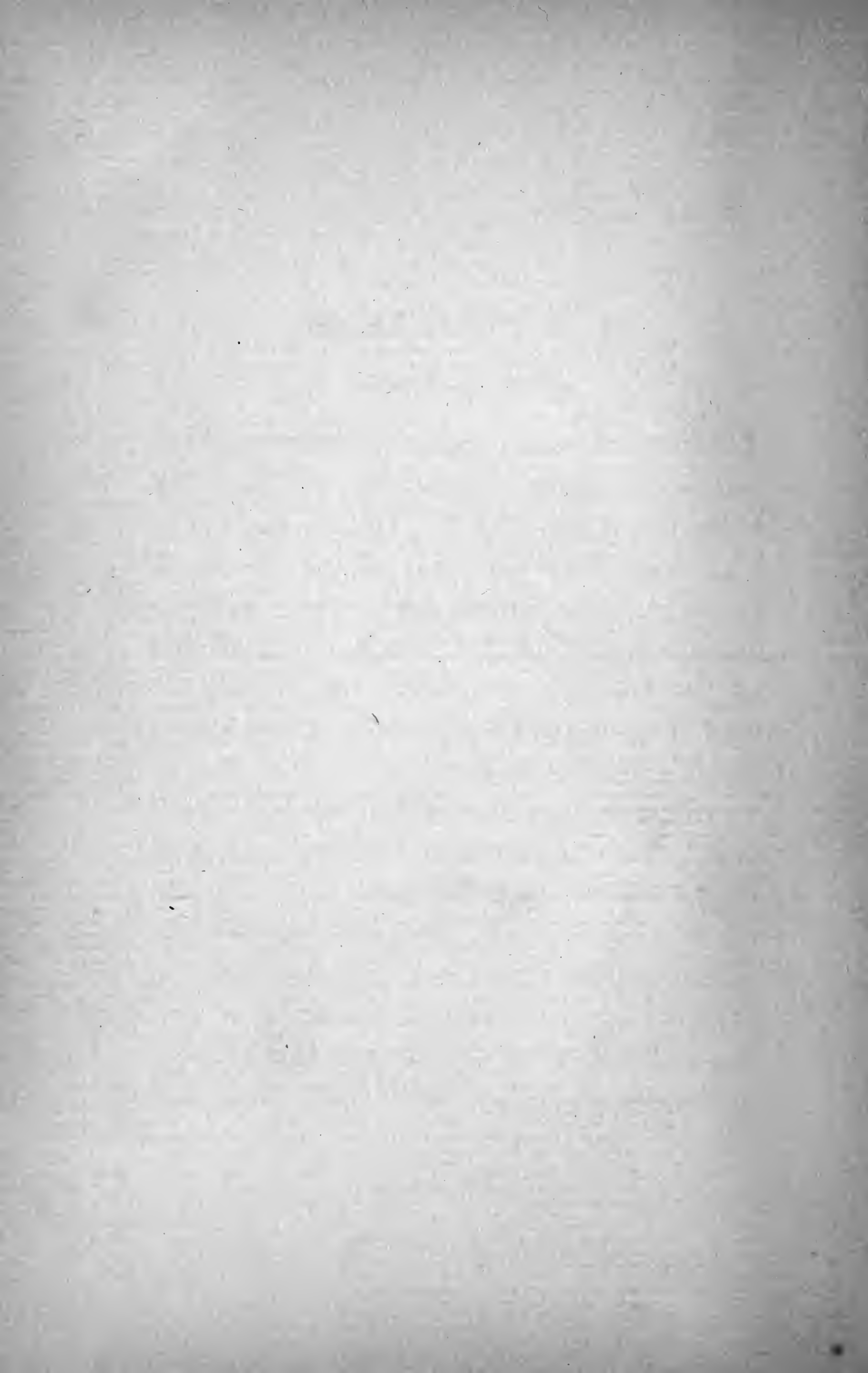
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THE FOREGLEAM



THE FOREGLEAM

Genesis iii, 15

THIS passage has ordinarily been regarded as the first glimpse of Christ and His work to be caught from the Old Testament. It has long been called the first of the Messianic passages. Our fathers saw in these words a definite prediction of the coming of Jesus and of His triumph over evil. Christ was the seed of the woman to whom the author looked for the world's redemption.

In later days the critical students have swung far to the opposite direction. According to such students the author is not thinking of Christ at all. He is thinking simply of the conflict raised between man and evil at the very beginning of human existence. Some forbid us to think even this much—and insist that the writer had before him

merely to account for man's hatred of reptiles and that he traced human animosity against the snake to an early betrayal of man's interests by a subtle serpent.

The Christian world is hardly likely to accept this detail of recent Biblical exegesis. We are not to be persuaded that the Genesis narrative has no deeper meaning than an attempt to account for an impulse to kill snakes. We soon get ourselves above the dry-as-dust of merely literal criticism. The Master said that the letter killeth, while the spirit giveth life. These words have application to others than the old-fashioned interpreters who took even figures of speech literally. The Master's words may well be borne in mind by new-fashioned interpreters as well. It is possible to use scientific methods with such painful exactness as to lose sight of inner symbolism and poetic suggestiveness. We can not read this story without feeling that the writer of Genesis is speaking of the conflict with evil in the heart of man. The subtlety

of the serpent is the subtlety of evil. There is no profounder statement in literature of the methods by which temptation comes than the story of Eve's temptation. The fruit is good for food—it is pleasant to look upon—it is to be desired to make one wise. Moreover, the serpent knows how to use a half-truth. The insinuation is that God has not told the truth—for on the day that the eater might partake, death would not come. Usefulness, beauty, wisdom—all are set forth as on the side of disobedience at the same time that the feeling is raised in the woman's heart that she has not been fairly dealt with. He who can read through this narrative and see in it simply a battle with a serpent must indeed have his eyes holden.

But how do the words refer to Christ? Literally, there seems to be no mention of Christ. We have only the story of a conflict, and are not even told how the conflict is to end. Must we not, then, give up the passage as Messianic? Must we not say that there

is no sense in which it can be used as a prediction of the birth of Christ?

We are coming more and more to see that we can not rule out of the Old Testament the real prophecy of Christ by ruling out a particular conception of the manner of that prophecy. Let it be granted that the ancient writer was thinking merely of the conflict which he saw around him. Sometimes men speak more wisely than they realize. Sometimes they use words into which an after age will pour fuller meanings than the writers knew.

The prophecy of the coming of Christ is in the very fact of the conflict at all. In the light of our full Christian knowledge we see that any conflict with evil implies and makes inevitable the coming of the Redeemer. The hopefulness of the Christian system is shown in the way we look back to this account of the Fall and see in it but one outcome—the victory of righteousness. We read the passage in the light of this con-

ception—there can be but one outcome. If the fight is on at all, victory is eventually assured. Suppose, for the sake of illustration, we think of that literalistic interpretation which made this story simply one of war with the reptile world. Let us imagine some wise serpent talking to his fellows about the advent of men. What would be the best advice he could give? What but this—that the serpent should keep out of the way of the man? If a conflict once starts, there can be but one outcome. It can only end in the victory of men over the subtlety and the venom of the serpent. Many men may fall in the warfare, but there can be but one end. The conflict will be a long one, but civilization will look forward with calm hopefulness to the day when the last poisonous enemy of mankind shall be crushed beneath the death-dealing heel. So in the conflict with sin. With the warfare once begun, there can be no rest until Christ comes—the final revelation of the purpose of God.

Or, to change the illustration, we may think of the victory of one world-empire over another. John Fiske has somewhere a striking passage in which he compares the advance of the English over the Allegheny Mountains against the French to an ominous strain which recurs again and again in a great opera. In the midst of the swelling outbursts there sound now and again the notes which tell of impending doom. The French Empire in America stretches from Quebec to New Orleans, reaching along the line of the Great Lakes, down the Mississippi River to the Gulf of Mexico—a continental domain apparently secure from successful attack. The English frontiersmen, however, here and there climb the Allegheny Mountains and strike at the line of the French outposts. The English stand for a more vital control of the wilderness than do the French, for a type of civilization more able to hold and utilize the American territory. Because the English stand for this higher

type of control, the first insignificant contests in the wilds of the Allegheny forests are prophecies of the flags of Wolfe on the Plains of Abraham and of the coming of the giant hosts which are to fasten English civilization in the Mississippi Valley. Of course the illustration is inadequate, since we must not make a conflict of English and French a conflict of good and evil, but in its large reach and significance this dramatic historical conflict does suggest the mighty meaning and prophecy which is often hidden in insignificant beginnings. Under whatever circumstances a man anywhere begins the fight against evil, he can rest assured that if he will but persist his conflict can have but one outcome. The Lord Christ will come. Any battle against unrighteousness means that the Christ revelation will be inevitable sooner or later.

We may say, then, first of all, that God is so interested in any stand on man's part against evil that the very beginning of the

fight is a prophecy of Christ as its end. There was a time when any aggressive movement of a certain great empire meant the coming of Napoleon. The aggressor might be in the first place some obscure corporal, but in his aggression was the forward-reaching of the empire and the prophecy of the coming of the emperor. So in the increase of that Christly kingdom which knows no end. Any frontier conflict means the touching of a signal line which runs to the capital and calls out in the end the last reserve.

We must go farther than this, however. We must put Christ, not merely at the end of the struggle, but also in the beginning. We are rapidly modifying our emphasis on God as a Helper in the time of crisis. The psalmist tells us that God is a very present Help in the time of trouble, and we rejoice in the thought of our ability to call upon God in seasons of imminent peril. There is, however, in this line of reflection too much chance to think of God merely as a Helper in

the time of emergency. We allow ourselves to believe that in many respects we can go on our way in the consciousness that God will help us out if we are caught in a pinch. Sin is here in the world. If we get caught in its toils God will help us out.

It is a mark of the increasing development of Christian consciousness that we are not to-day laying entire stress on the thought of God as the Deliverer who comes in at the end as the final reserve. Rather, we are thinking of God as the Prompter of the very beginning of all conflicts against evil. It was God who at the very beginning set enmity in the heart of man against all the serpent brood of evil. The Christ spirit was at work in the heart of the first man who was moved to strike against evil. We must not think of this narrative as a looking forward to Christ merely as One who would some day come. In a profound and real sense, Christ is at the beginning of every struggle for righteousness. We look upon the very open-

ing sentence of Genesis as a mark of the divineness of the story, "In the beginning, God." In the opening of John's Gospel, the writer tells us of the Word which was in the beginning. We must think of Christ as at the beginning of our struggles against evil. He is in the first questionings, the stirrings of the heart toward better things. The feeling of loathing for evil like the loathing of man against the serpent is a revelation of the Spirit of Christ. He is the Author as well as the Finisher of our struggle against the sin which is in the world. He Himself is on the frontier forcing the attacks. In fact, the success of the Christ kingdom depends upon its aggressiveness. The Eden story is being repeated in life after life to-day, but with a difference. In the Eden story we are told of a deliberate disobedience to a command given before the fruit of the tree had been touched. In our day we have been eating of the fruit of the tree with all good conscience. Suddenly the

command comes: "Eat of the fruit no longer. Henceforth it is forbidden." That is to say, the growing conscience insists that things which once brought no sense of guilt are seen to be wrong if we keep on doing them. It is the Spirit of Christ which keeps thus forcing the conflict.

The Christ Spirit is apparent also in something in the very narrative itself, considered as a narrative. The Divine Spirit was not only in the conflict with evil, but was also in the account of the conflict with evil. The character of evil is seized with unerring accuracy. Evil is serpentine. It insinuates itself into the heart of man with the noiseless glide of the serpent. On the other hand, the victory is to come as men strike in a straightforward way at the evil. Their stamping with the heel is the true Christ method in dealing with sin. Christ does not attempt to conquer sin by stratagem or to outflank evil in any way. He strikes at it with the heel.

In all illustrations which set forth the nature of the conflict of good with evil we have to be on our guard not to imply something foreign to our purpose. We wish to suggest here an illustration drawn from the remark of a wise statesman as to the way Democracy could overcome sedition and rebellion against the righteous will of the vast mass of the people. Let the dashing military brilliancy be on the side of the rebellion. Let the rebellion be led by commanders of most subtle genius and lightning-like swiftness. Yet the people will win, and the victory of the people will come as the people see that, no matter how ably led a secession may be from the standpoint of brilliant generalship, the simple determination of a righteous people to strike directly and persistently at rebellion will come to victory in the end. That is to say, the straightforward blow of democracy, when once the whole people are fully aroused, will avail against keen generalship, no matter how fine and acute.

The Christ method is not the method of brilliancy or subtlety or fascinating acuteness. It is a method within reach of any intelligence, however lowly. When sin arises, we are to strike at it. It may come upon us by quiet approaches, by fascinating brilliancy, but the one method is always at hand—to strike and strike to the death. This setting forth of the essential Christ method shows that the Spirit of Christ Himself was present in this first story of evil. Jesus was called Jesus, for He was to save His people from their sins. The Spirit of Jesus is set forth in the story of the heel raised against the serpent. His Spirit is not merely anticipated in the first chapters of Genesis, but is also in a measure revealed there.



GOD WITH US



GOD WITH US

Matt. i, 23.

MANY classes of interpreters have contributed to the understanding of this passage. First of all are the many theologians who have connected the passage with a great miracle and have seen in the miracle the sign of God's presence with His people. These theologians declare that to men lost in the thought of the world as a self-running system the Almighty has appeared with an extraordinary manifestation, setting aside the ordinary laws and inaugurating the unique career of our Lord in a unique way.

We are thankful for this interpretation with its stress on the miraculous. We are a little prone to minimize the importance of the extraordinary in our day and to lay stress upon the divineness of the ordinary.

God is in all things, we say. We should not forget, however, that the world came to believe that God is in all things in general through an emphasis on the doctrine that He is in some things in particular. We may be able to get along without emphasis on miracle to-day, but our emphasis on the natural would hardly have been possible if men of another day had not laid stress on the miracle. When men once found a manifestation of God in any extraordinary "there," it was easy to find Him in an ordinary "here." The belief in the God of the extraordinary helped on to the belief in the God of the ordinary. If men had not first been impressed by the significance of the extraordinary in Christ, they would have paid little attention to His revelation of the divine in the ordinary.

God showed that He was with us by the birth of Christ. We are not able to stop, however, with interpretations which end with physical births. The truth that God is near

enough to the physical forces to use them or to suspend them according to His will is not enough. A physical wonder is not enough. Almost all will admit to-day the marvel of miracle that God is so near men that in Him they live and move and have their being. The more important question is as to whether God is with us in any other sense than that we are the creatures of His power.

At this point the close students of the passage in its original setting come to us to tell us that it means that God is on our side. The words were first uttered, we are told, in connection with a definite crisis in Israel's history. At a certain historical emergency God showed Himself so decisively on the side of Israel that the mother named her new-born son Emmanuel,—God is with us. The birth of Christ was another such crisis. We can see the meaning so clearly that we can say as did the patriotic Israelitish mother, God is with us.

We are thankful for this interpretation

also. We are glad for those sudden crises in human history when God does show His plan. He showed Himself as with Israel in the old days and He showed Himself as with the world in the birth of Christ. But the terms are still too large. We are glad for revelation to nations and to the world, but the "us" is still too large. We want something that reaches us with more of a sense of intimacy. And we want something more than a coming of God in a crisis, for after all we do not live in crises.

The historical student adds his interpretation to that above. He does not see in the birth of Christ so much the sudden, swift revelation at a critical moment as the culmination of a divine process reaching all through Israel's history. God had been at work from the beginning speaking in divers portions the message of which the birth of Christ is the climax.

We are thankful again. We delight to dwell on the long workings of those forces

which prepared for Christ and which finally found their top and crown in Him. The prophets did a great work in shaping the national ideal of God and Israel. There is nothing more inspiring about the Old Testament than the way the popular ideal of the heroism of God changed from the conception of a warrior rejoicing with martial zest over the downfall of His enemies to the thought of a God who could help and uplift a suffering servant, the ideal becoming filled constantly with a worthier moral meaning. As the prophets did their part, individuals realized the dreams of the seers, and finally the conceptions became regnant in the popular thought, expressing themselves in the laws of the people. By the way, we should do larger justice to the old Hebrew system of law as a factor working to prepare for Christ. We ordinarily think of the old law from the standpoint of Paul, and call it a schoolmaster to bring men to Christ by showing its own powerlessness to save.

There is another side, however. The law was a positive force working to make men decent and merciful and human as a preparation for the coming of Christ. "Thou shalt not seethe a kid in its mother's milk." This rule could have had no other aim than to train the people in mercy and humanity. And all through the old Jewish life, in the laws, in the customs, in those simple human experiences which give such charm to stories like the story of Ruth, the ancestress of Christ, the Spirit of the Lord was at work with the people to make the prophecies and the heroic deeds and the laws and the daily life a preparation for the coming of Him who was indeed Emmanuel. All the good in the old system came to climax in Him.

We rejoice in all this, but even this is not enough. God is indeed with us in the great historic movements, but still we lack something intimate and personal. The play and inter-play of the long historic forces is dramatically interesting, but we as individ-

uals desire something further still. We listen to those devout minds who tell us that God is with us as a spectator is "with" the actor of a drama. We are not living and dying alone. God is interested. If we could only see we should find ourselves upon the center of a stage with high Heaven our chief spectator,—applauding us when we win, sorrowing with us when we fall. God is with us in the sense that the drama of our lives means more to Him than to any one else.

It is indeed encouraging to know that we are not struggling unobserved, that among the cloud of heavenly witnesses who watch our course the most interested is God. We still call for something more, however. How sympathetic after all is the Great Spectator? Does He understand from our side this grim and desperate game which we call life? Is He with us merely as a spectator, or has He ever been in the struggle Himself? Is there any way in which He can come down from

the galleries and wrestle with the wrestlers and run with the runners?

Still another insists that we must advance beyond the thought that in the coming of Christ we have merely the manifestation of God's interest in us, and that we must think of God as abundantly showering good gifts upon us to reveal His interest in us. God is with us in Christ in the sense that Christ is the gift of God. The Giver is in the Gift.

But how are we to think of the Giver? Is He such a Giver as a modern philanthropist? One of the limitations of modern philanthropy is that the giver can not really get himself into his gift, or, rather, the receiver can not get the giver with the gift. The more widely the philanthropist gives, the more difficult it is to impart that personal touch which marks a gift with distinction. And the richer the giver the less the gift is apt to mean to him. He may give lavishly, as gifts go among men, and yet not really

give till he feels. There is not much of one's self in a gift which one does not feel. Christ may be the Gift of God, but before we can speak of the Gift as "God with us" we have to know something of what Christ is to God. Is Christ merely a human prophet through whom God has revealed Himself? If that is all that is much, to be sure, but not quite enough, for it would seem quite easy for God to call prophets into existence. Such a gift would be like the gift of the rich man who might give out of great interest and sympathy, indeed, but at no vast cost to himself.

To bring this rather rambling discussion to a point, we may say that in calling Christ the Son of God the Church has always had in mind the thought of Him as more than a human prophet merely. The Church has not always been able to define satisfactorily to herself, to say nothing of outsiders, just what she has meant by "Son," but she has meant more than man, and in her insistence

upon that "more" is the very heart of the Christmas message. Her theological statement may have limped, but her instinct has walked, even run, straight to the mark. She has craved the very deepest coming of God in Christ, and in trying to make Christ mean the most for God she has been trying to make Him mean the most for men.

Is it not enough, some one may say, to think of God in Christ in the sense that Christ was a man of extraordinary capacity for religious spirit? Is it not enough to say that Christ is in the religious world what Kant is in the realm of philosophy and Shakespeare in the realm of literature and Raphael in the world of art? Of course, the answer to this question will depend on the individual sense of need. Without reflecting in the least upon the many, many good persons who would say "yes" to the question, we can not refrain from saying that such a placing of Christ would never finally satisfy the vast mass of believers. The contempla-

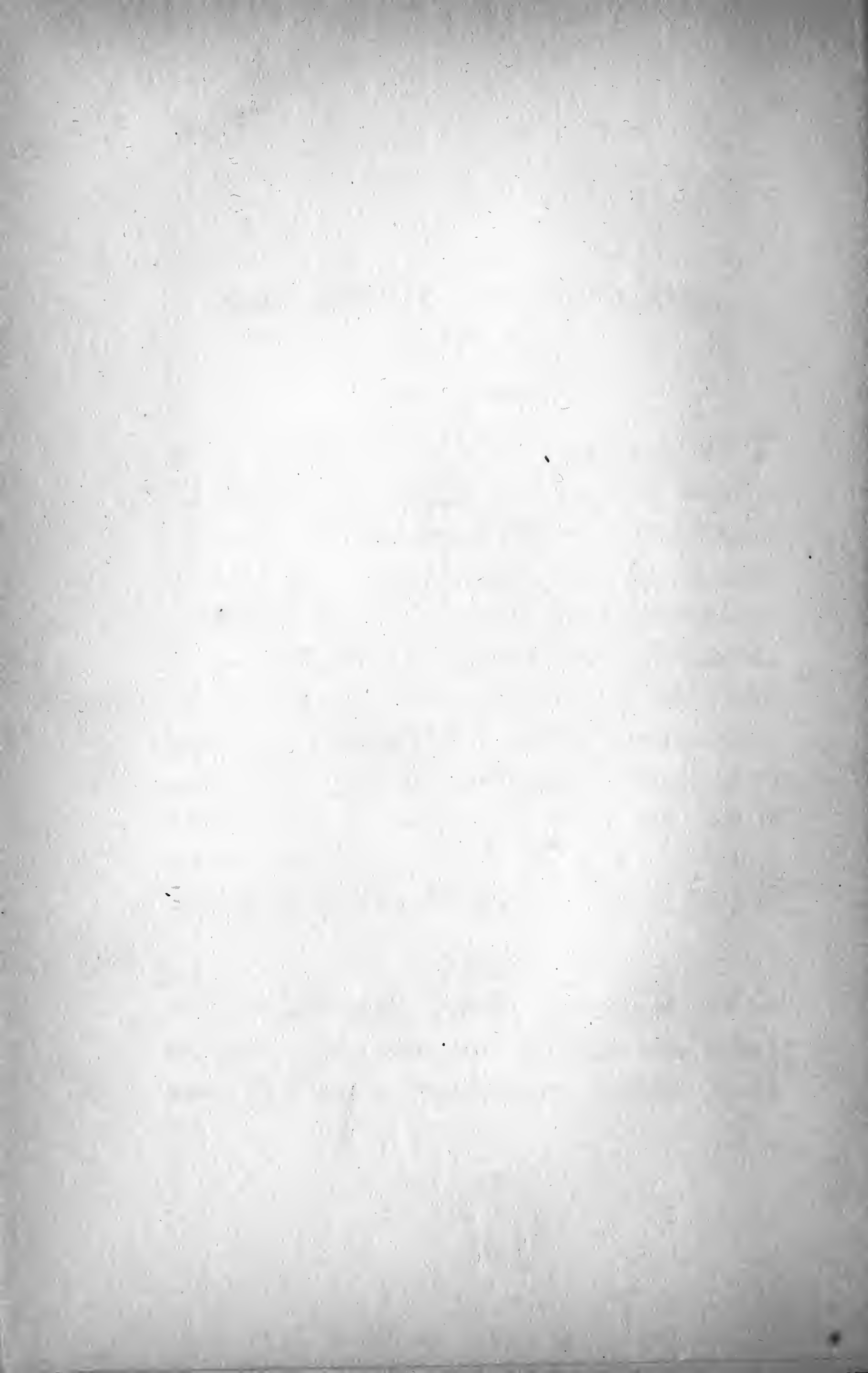
tion of Shakespeare and Kant and Raphael makes us indeed proud of the human race, but the closer we study the more we see the enormous distance between these great minds and ourselves. They tower aloft like mountains. Now many of us feel in the same way when we think of Christ merely as a man. Contradictory as it may sound, the thought that He is just a man puts a great gulf between Him and us. We feel that with all His sympathy He is after all a genius with all the loneliness of genius. If, on the other hand, we may take the phrase "Son of God" as implying such a uniqueness of intimacy with God that in the earthly life of the Son the Father can be said in a certain real sense to have come to us Himself, the matter is quite different. Christ then becomes not merely a revelation of how far a man can outdo his fellows in his approach to God, but rather a revelation of how far God can outdo all our expectations of Him in His approach toward man. It is just this that the Church

has had at heart in her many times bewildering phrases concerning the divinity of Christ. She has been trying to guard the truth that Christ meets human needs not so much by showing how far up man can go, but by showing how far down God can come.

Understand, now, we are not trying to talk theology. We are not even trying to present a view which will impress all as logically consistent. We are simply trying to say that if Christ means so much to God that He is the most Precious Gift God can give us, if in the very coming of Christ we see the desire of God to lift us up to Himself, then God's Fatherhood for us means most to us. The Gospel is not merely that God has wrought miracles for us. A Creator who could make a world might work miracles without any great cost to Himself. The Gospel is not that God has out of a bounteous storehouse showered good gifts upon us. A rich God, merely amiable and good-humored, might do that without calling forth respect,

not to say love, in response. No: the Gospel is that God sent His Son. We are to take the words for what they suggest in warm life-terms, not in metaphysical abstractions. God with us means the surpassing love of God, not for man, or for humanity, but for His children. God is near us in nature, and in history, and in all forces that touch our lives for good. The message of Christmas is that He is especially near us in Christ. The Scriptures express the love of God in Christ in speaking of Christ as the Son of God. If we fill the words with rich human meaning we are close to the heart of the deepest reality in the universe, even the abounding love of God. God's power is upon us and, better still, His love is with us. To be sure, metaphysics is puzzled and raises questions at all this, but metaphysics has always been puzzled by the mysteries of love. But love has the first claim, and quite likely will have the last.

**THE GROUPS AROUND THE
CRADLE**



THE GROUPS AROUND THE CRADLE

Matt. ii, 1-12

THE passage before us introduces us to various persons and groups of persons interested in the new-born Christ. For the moment at least the thought of Christ is uppermost in the minds of all these persons. Herod, the people of Jerusalem, the scribes and chief priests, the wise men, Mary—all these are set before us in the story of to-day as supremely interested in the child Jesus. It may be worth our while to think of the motives and spirit of these different minds as they pondered upon the coming of Christ.

HEROD

We begin with Herod. Herod no sooner hears the word of the wise men than he turns Biblical and theological student. He

is profoundly interested forthwith in the Jewish Scriptures and in the prophecies of the birth of the Messiah. He diligently questions the wise men also. For the moment there is not a more earnest student of Jewish religion in Jerusalem than Herod. If we are to think of the groups first interested in the birth of Christ as in a poetic sense representative of students who would approach the same problem in a later day, we may see in Herod the type of a man who studies with an evil purpose—the man who would learn of Christianity for the sake of overthrowing Christianity. It must never be forgotten that such men are serious foes. Their power must never be underestimated. Oftentimes the foe of the Christ knows more about the Christ than does the disciple. Herod learned so much about Christ that it took a dream sent by the Almighty to throw him off the track. And yet Herod was never really on the track. He could not imagine any other kingdom than one like his own;

the thought of a kingdom of righteousness was utterly beyond him. Herod is a type of the bad man whom knowledge of the Christ makes worse. The news that Christ was born troubled the evil depths of Herod's soul and brought deceit and murder to the surface. Happily, we can believe that students of the Herod type have become fewer and fewer.

JERUSALEM

All Jerusalem was troubled together with Herod, the narrative tells us. Jerusalem may stand in our thought as representative of that vast mass of persons who in a vague way dread the coming of Christ through fear of the upheaval and revolution which He may make. On that night when the message of the wise men came, all that Jerusalem thought about was one immediate fact—here may be a new claimant to the throne. The present Herod will fight to retain supremacy. That means that we, the people of Jerusalem, must see our streets red with slaugh-

ter. The new King may be the legitimate claimant, but His birth can mean only trouble. He may be able to establish finally the glory dreamed of by the old prophets, but He will have to wade through woe. We shall drink deep of the woe, and may not taste the glory. Some such reflections as these may have caused all Jerusalem to be troubled with Herod. Just such reflections as these have met other reports of approaching manifestations of the Christ. If the Christ spirit seems about to call for advance in industrial or political or social conditions, or even in matters of ordinary morality, more than one group of frightened souls will think not of the ultimate glory but of the immediate struggle, and be "troubled." Here, again, we may happily believe that the number of those who will bear their part of the cost of getting Herod out and Christ in is constantly increasing. Such persons do not minimize the seriousness of the difficulties. Christ did not come to oust Herod actually,

but if Christ could have put His spirit into the heart of Herod, many political readjustments would have been necessary. No matter where the pinch comes, however, there are, perhaps, more to-day than ever before who are willing to welcome the Christ, even if He call for the vastest changes and sacrifices.

THE CHIEF PRIESTS AND SCRIBES

The chief priests and scribes were also interested when the wise men came with their word about the star. Herod called these religious authorities into consultation with him at once, and set them to looking up the prophecies with a new zeal. We do no injustice to the scribes and chief priests when we characterize them as interested in the coming of Christ, largely from a technical and professional standpoint. While we are not able to indulge in wholesale condemnations, we know that the scribes and priests never came as a class to any kind of spiritual insight into the greatness of Christ. Along

with the utmost familiarity with writings about Christ went an utter foreignness to the Spirit of Christ. So we are to think of this group of men interested in the coming of Christ as representative of the class of students to whom Christ is merely an intellectual problem. This is not intended in the slightest to reflect on intellectual approach to the problems of Christianity, but to indicate the futility of intellectualism when it becomes self-sufficient and narrowly technical. Such intellectualism was interested and aroused at the birth of Christ: we need not be surprised to find it interested and aroused at every stirring of the Christ spirit since. It can hardly be counted among the allies of Christ. At the best it is apt to run off into literalism, and at the worst it leads itself to blind assault on that fine, intuitive, spiritual understanding which is the real discernment of the Christ. This spiritual discernment is both the root and flower of true and vital scholarship.

THE WISE MEN

The chief priests and scribes were seekers after knowledge. The wise men seem to have been in search of wisdom. Where the scribes sought bare literal fact, the wise men looked for guiding and controlling principle. In the scribes the intellect alone was athirst. In the wise men there was a call of the whole nature for the streams of deep and satisfying life. We may think of the wise men as lifelong seekers after spiritual understanding. They had, no doubt, left no stone unturned for the sake of reaching the highest wisdom. They were not afraid to pay any price. They shrank from no hardships. In all that they did we see the marks of wisdom. They knew the might and value of a real King. They knew the difference between the real and the sham kingliness. Herod was actually in control at Jerusalem, but they had no gold or frankincense or myrrh for Herod and no worship for him. They were not to be misled by

outward appearances. There was not much to suggest royalty in the inn at Bethlehem, but something told the wise men that they were in the presence of real kingliness. They felt that after their far travelings they had come to an end. An inner discernment enabled them to see that the King of wisdom had at last come. The wise men stand in adoring interest beside the new-born Christ as representatives of the wisdom-seekers in all ages who finally arrive at the truth which satisfies the inner yearnings. They knew less, so far as matter-of-fact information was concerned, about the promised Messiah than did the chief priests and the scribes. In spiritual discernment, however, they were true King-seekers. The scribes would have objected that the wise men were astrologers, and that their previous reflections were so full of error that their pronouncement could only be mistaken. The scribes would have called the findings of the wise men the wild guesses of mistaken laymen, and outside lay-

men at that, but the laymen and not the professionalists had the right of it.

MARY

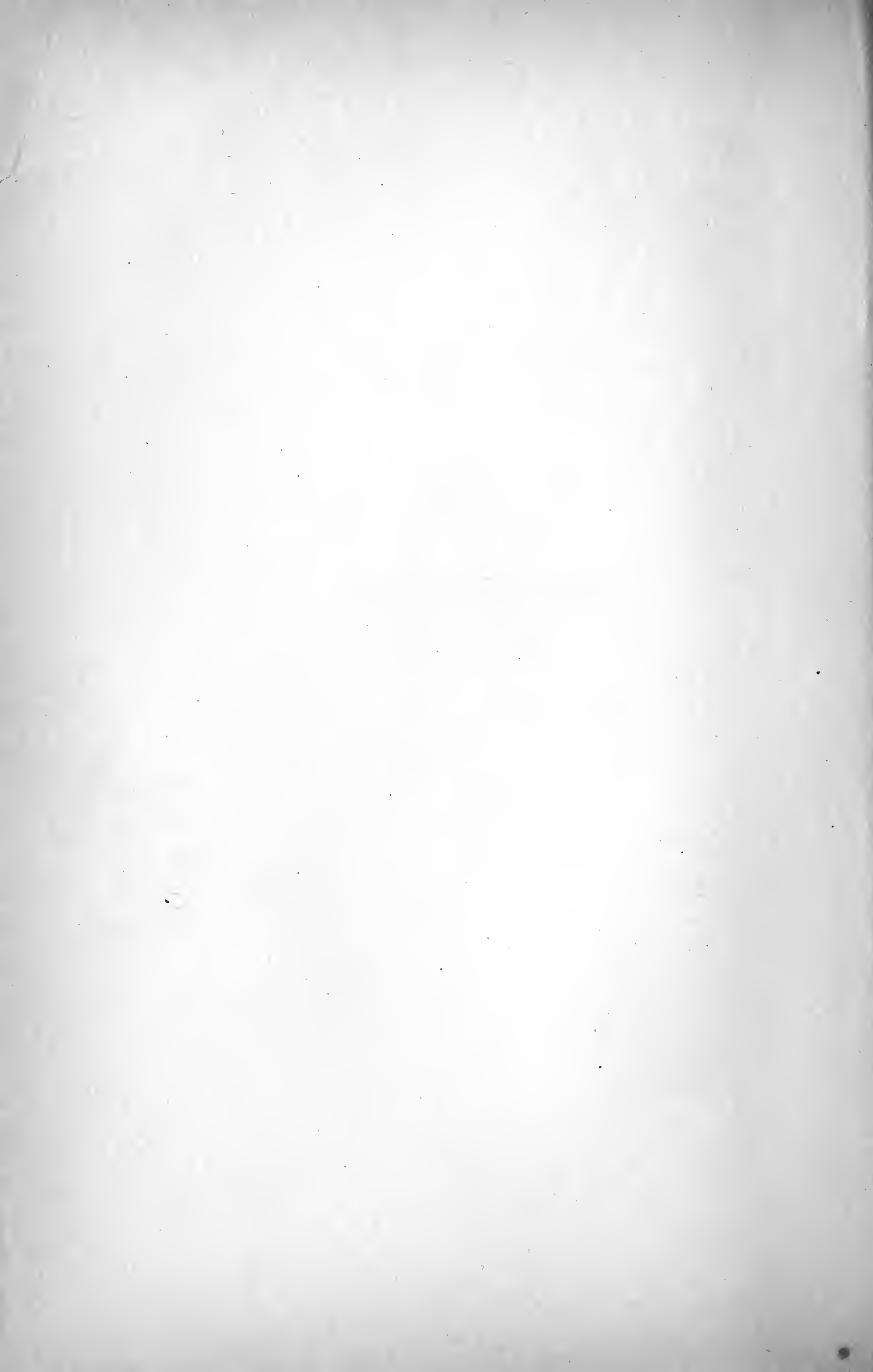
Our lesson mentions another character—Mary, the mother of Jesus. It would be almost sacrilege to attempt to enter into the thought of Mary at the time of the visit of the wise men. She stood in an altogether unique relation to Christ. There were some things which she could ponder in her own heart with the consciousness that these were for her alone. Still, without attempting to imagine to ourselves the wonderings and conjectures and forebodings and joys of Mary, may we not think of her as the representative of those whose interest in Christ is even more than that of the wisest seekers after wisdom? May we not think of Mary's experience as in a degree repeated in the lives of those who have come so close to Christ that their interest in Him is indescribably definite and personal. Such do not

think of Christ merely as the Fountain of wisdom and of life. By a process of personal identification with His interests they have come to that kind of spiritual kinship with Him which Jesus must have had in mind when He claimed those that do the will of God as kinsmen. Christ is not the mere personification of truth. The relation to Him can be closer than a relation to a "personification" of anything.

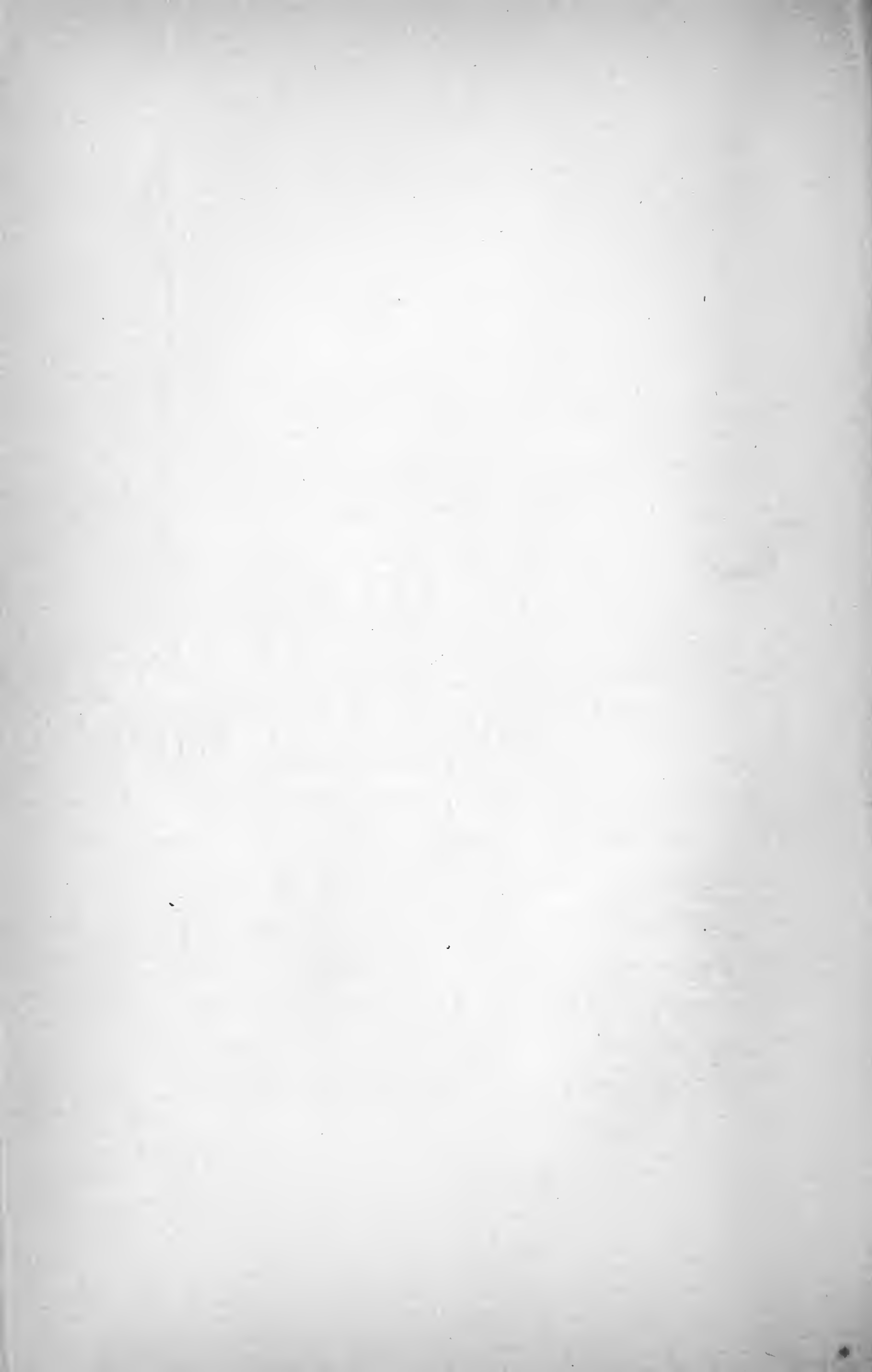
THE THOUGHTS OF MANY HEARTS REVEALED

The thoughts of many hearts shall be revealed by Him, was said of Christ. The words were true, even as the Child lay in His cradle. Herod hears of Christ, and Herod's cruel hatred comes to light. Jerusalem hears, and is troubled. The chief priests hear, and betake themselves to their technical studies. The wise men see, and their inner wisdom appears in their worship. Mary gazes, and the depths of her nature appear in her pondering silence. And these

persons and groups of persons are representatives. To-day, every day, the word comes that some new manifestation of the Christ is at hand. And Herod hates, and Jerusalem is troubled, and the scribes look away from the spirit to the letter, and the wise men worship and the spiritual kinsmen of Christ feel anew His sorrows and His joys.



THE WISE MEN



THE WISE MEN

Matthew ii, 1-12

THE wise men in our story were in all likelihood astrologers. For many centuries before the coming of Christ the stars had been studied in Arabia and Persia and other Eastern countries with results which would do credit to modern scientists. Of course, the theories of astronomy in that olden time were altogether mistaken, but the facts were observed and recorded with a patience and skill which are the wonder of later students.

To this highly trained intellectual class the wise men of the story probably belonged. In their thoughtful gazings into the sky they had been impressed with some unusual phenomenon which we do not now understand. It may have been a conjunction of planets, or the appearance of some cometlike wan-

derer within the limits of our solar system, or some altogether extraordinary manifestation which arrested the attention and stimulated the inquiry of these men. Whatever the nature of the light, it started the wise men, according to the New Testament story, on a physical journey which ended at the inn at Bethlehem and upon a spiritual pilgrimage which ended with the worship of Jesus.

If we look at all deeply into the astrology of the wise men of old we are impressed with the imperfections of their teachings. The facts were, of course, the same for them as for us, but in their interpretation of the fact was much crudity and error. The stars were supposed to have a controlling influence in human lives. When the astrologers spoke of "His star" they probably meant the star which was to preside over Christ's earthly destinies. Our old expression, "born under a lucky star," is a survival from astrology. Moreover, the crudity of astrology was not only intellectual, but also moral. The star-

gazer was often tempted to practice fraud, and often yielded. He too often gave himself to black magic, which was especially black in the use to which it was often put—the rule of men through terror and superstition.

Yet to the representatives of this imperfect system the star of Christ came. Every step of their reasoning about the star was probably tainted with error, but every step brought them nearer Jerusalem. Is it not often thus in the history of nations and of individuals? If we had to wait until we had perfect intelligence, who would find God? Does not God come so close to men that He can work through their imperfect understanding and guide every mistaken step toward Jerusalem? The treasures of our modern science have come as men have been sincerely willing to act out the measure of truth which they have possessed. As they have thus acted God has used even the mistakes to help them onward toward Himself. It

would be interesting to look through the history of the world and trace the beneficial influences of mistakes which men made in a sincere search for truth. If Columbus had not been mistaken he would hardly have sailed for the West, and if the early chemists had not thought that lead could be transmuted into gold we might not have had the wealth of scientific treasure in which we now revel. In a classic bit of satire Swift makes us smile at the poor scientist whom Gulliver found in his travels, the soot-covered experimenter who was trying to extract sunbeams from cucumbers! We should not laugh ourselves into forgetfulness of the fact, however, that scientific progress has often come as a side discovery when the searcher was looking for an actual absurdity, a good deal as if Gulliver's scientist should have in his foolish search added greatly to this world's knowledge both of cucumbers and of sunshine. As it is in science, so also is it in religion—the path to truth sometimes lies

through mistake. Suppose the modern critics are right in their thought of the beginnings of the world's religion. Suppose that the idea of immortality first got afloat through dreams, or that the first idea of God was very crude, or that there is an alloy of myth and legend and mistake in all religious records? What of it? Can not the same God who came down to the imperfect knowledge of the astrologer and pointed it toward Bethlehem likewise hang a star before the imperfect intelligence of all seekers after Himself?

We have said that astrology studied the stars to find their influence on human destiny. The expectation was mistaken, of course, but what rich suggestion there is in the thought that the highest truth has bearing on the practical issues of life, and what fine symbolism is to be found in the fact that men reading the stars for their message for the earth found their way to Bethlehem. Christ is the very King of all those who seek

the loftiest truth for the most practical purpose. He belongs not to those who look at the stars with no thought of the ennobling influence of celestial contemplation for terrestrial deeds, nor to those who never lift their eyes off the brown earth. Rather He is the Leader of those who take the loftiest conceptions for the enrichment of the commonest life. His truth, lofty as it is, is the most usable truth. Upon one occasion Jesus said, "I am the Light of the world," and with this exalted conception in His mind stooped to moisten clay for the anointing of a blind man's eyes. At another time He reflected for a moment upon the profoundest significance of His existence—the fact that He came from God and that He was about to go to God—and then began to wash the disciples' feet! It was not to be wondered at that those who tried to find in the skies meanings for earth's deeds found the path to Bethlehem.

There is a larger significance in the jour-

ney of the wise men, however. We have here the first hint of the disturbance and readjustment in the vast outside world through the coming of Jesus. If we could to-day create a new star by fiat and swing it into space it would instantly disturb the orbits of the present system, and, if large enough, would make itself the center of a new system. The appearance of the star at Bethlehem meant the formation of new orbits. These wise men were the first of the Gentiles to feel the subtle gravitation of the new center, and swung out of their orbit instantly with a new mental and spiritual adjustment. It was just as unreasonable for the Jews to expect that the work of the Christ would be confined to them as it would be for a scientist to expect a newcomer into the solar system to halt its attractive power at the frontiers of the system, or the new sun to screen its light from the outlying regions.

The star of Bethlehem reaches out for the highest and best everywhere. Nothing

in the course of history is more inspiring than the certainty with which the best in Gentilism swings at last into the Christ-centered orbit. At the moment when Christ was born He came into the outer edge of the great Roman Empire. Within a few centuries Christianity had picked up all that was good in Rome and was whirling it in a new orbit around itself. The very roads of Rome were used for the new truth, and the great schemes of law and administration were given a loftier purpose than their founders had ever dreamed of. What Rome had done on a more material side Greece had done on a more intellectual side. Where the Roman thought had busied itself with the creation of a splendid material empire, the Greek mind had fashioned an even more splendid thought empire. It was not long before the Christian fathers put Christ at the center of Greek thought, and made the Greek idea of Divine Word a mighty commentary on the Incarnation of the Word of God in Jesus

Christ. So it has been in later times. The shaggy strength of the Teutons quieted down into a fixed Christ-controlled path. The present-day achievements of our marvelous scientific systems are being used in Christian ministry.

It would not be inappropriate to use this passage about the wise men as a missionary lesson. The gravitation of the outside world toward Christ has not ceased. The somewhat fanciful suggestion is sometimes made that we have in the story of the wise men a prophecy of the movement of the East toward the West, the Oriental wealth of intellect seeking a king in the more practical Occidental leadership. The suggestion is rather read into the text than found there, but the principle of spiritual gravitation which makes for a Christ-centered system leads us to believe that the day is not far distant when that marvelous and luxuriant spiritual life of the Orient which has been the wonder of students from the beginning shall in spite

of its mistakes and follies find its way to Bethlehem and enrich the Christian system with its gold and frankincense and myrrh. In our zeal for the betterment of the outside world of Gentilism we sometimes forget the enrichment which is to come to Christianity itself through bringing all religions to the Christ. The believers in Buddhism and Confucianism have rich gifts which are one day to be laid at the feet of Christ. For the sake of the glorification of Christ Himself we should lend to the rays of the star of Bethlehem the intensity of our own burning zeal.

THE SHEPHERDS



THE SHEPHERDS

Luke ii, 8-15

GOD'S revelations are not primarily for the learned in technical scholarship or for the minds gifted with exceptional genius. They are quite as likely to come to shepherds as to readers of books. The coming of God in Christ has the large part of its meaning for the common people of the world. The shepherds are the representatives of the faithful souls who do God's works in the world by laboring to keep men in clothing and food. The world is never more than one year from famine. That is to say, there is never more than enough food at one time on earth to keep men for a year if the work of production should cease. But the work of production does not cease. The shepherds are the type of those who go forth to stand between the world and famine and naked-

ness. Keeping watch against the wolf which would kill the sheep, they are keeping watch also against that more terrible wolf of human hunger and pain which is never very far from any door. Is there not a divine fitness in God's sending the angels to the shepherds? For what class has revelation more of joy than for the workers of the world? And where is it more likely to receive a cordial welcome than in the hearts of the simple folk who faithfully plod on through the years with the work which Providence has laid upon them? These are very apt to be more deeply educated than the more artificially trained. Higher education is not always deeper education. The firsthand contact with reality in the ordinary walks of life, the patient self-control which comes with long performance of an exacting task, the tact and wisdom which are necessary for success even in dealing with sheep, are quite as likely to beget the deep receptivity for divine things as are the artificial courses of

the schools. Let no man be held back from expecting a revelation from God's angels through lack of technical training. One thing is sure. No carefully trained graduate of the best university could have told his story with more effectiveness than these shepherds described what they had seen in the fields. Quite likely Christ chose His immediate apostles from the lowly walks of life because they were the best educated for His purpose—for hearing and telling the good news of God.

We are not, however, to think that the shepherds in this story acted simply in a representative capacity. They were not chosen to be witnesses of the vision and hearers of the voices simply because they were shepherds and common people. In some respects they were very uncommon, and we should stop to think of these men not only because of the class they came from, but because of the character of the men themselves.

We are not to assume as a matter of course that just everybody and anybody would have seen the light of the divine glory and would have heard the divine voices. If God's accustomed methods are any clue to His dealings on this marvelous night, we must say that the shepherds saw angels and heard voices, because their minds were open to angels and voices. It would seem the most natural thing in the world for shepherds keeping watch over their flocks by night to keep watch on the skies also, but many a midnight watcher does not think of the skies. He thinks only of the flocks—of the business immediately in hand. But the man who thinks only of the business in hand does not always get the largest messages for the world. The shepherd who brings us good tidings which shall be to all people must be more than a shepherd. He must be shepherd with an eye open to the skies. A man who was a shepherd and that only might not have seen anything on that famous night.

If there had been nothing but sheep in the inner thought, quite likely there would have been nothing but sheep in the outer revelation—nothing of real significance we mean. Shepherds who were shepherds and nothing more might have seen light and heard voices, but they would not have caught the meaning. What a man sees depends upon what the man is; there is no more commonplace and yet mightily significant truth taught in the schools than this. Not every shepherd could see an angel if one stood beside him. He might think that he had seen a ghost or a demon. Not every shepherd could have heard such a message. No; the shepherds were there not merely as representatives of a class, but because of what they were themselves. They were shepherds, but something more—shepherds who could see up as well as down, who could see angels as well as sheep.

Another feature in this story is the extraordinary power with which these shep-

herds seized the essential in the revelation. The usual course for the ordinary human mind in the presence of an unusual revelation is to seize upon and be impressed by the unusual, especially if that unusual is at all spectacular. Here is a revelation which is represented as being spectacular. There are a vision of angels, and a great light, and a heavenly chorus. It would be very easy for the mind, even though it were open to visions, to lay stress on the non-essentials. What was the light like? Was it like daylight, or stronger, or weaker? And who would not like to know how an angel appears? Does he look like a man? Does he walk or does he fly? What is the manner of his speech? And then the multitude—how great a multitude was it? These questions seem ridiculous, and possibly irreverent, but they seem so partly because they are not in the story. Yet they are precisely the kind of questions that the ordinary mind would be likely to ask, and they concern the

features for which the ordinary mind would be likely to look. In days that had departed from the simplicity of the first revelation men supposed to be wise asked just such questions as these. Yet when our minds enter into the spirit of the story the questions seem far-fetched and out of place. The revelations which really come from God center around a message. They come to minds that can see and hear the message, to the exclusion of everything else. We get nothing from the story of these shepherds except the great truth concerning the tidings, which means that the shepherds could be trusted to tell the message. To put the thought in colloquial language, it requires more than an ordinary mind to get the point of a surpassing revelation, and having seized the point, to keep it. Possibly the most wonderful fact about the story told by the shepherds is to be found in what it does not say. It does not tell us about angels or about the marvelous light, but it does give

us the heart of the message. A really divine message is almost always brief. If the message begins to lengthen out under the telling, we may be pretty sure that the main point is being dimmed by irrelevant details. This is a mark of the genuineness of any extraordinary revelation from God—it bears an extraordinary meaning. The question is not as to how the recipient of the message felt or as to how spectacular was the manifestation; the question, rather, is as to what the message means, now that we have it. Of recent years some curious psychological investigators have forced upon our attention the fact that the emotional attendants of experiences which have always seemed marvelous in religion can be produced by other agencies than the religious—that hypnotism and intoxicants and narcotics will produce the emotional crises that seem so wonderful when we see them in religious excitement. But when the investigators have gone on to conclude that therefore religious experience is of no

more worth than these other experiences, we call a halt. We point out that the significant element in a religious revelation is its meaning. The final question is always, "What of it?" In the case of the hypnotism and other things, "Nothing of it." In the case of the shepherds and their message, "Everything of it."

Again we are told that the shepherds went with haste to Bethlehem. What did they do with the sheep? We are not told that there were any volunteers to stay with them, or that they drew lots as to who should stand guard, or that they went to Bethlehem in turns, or that they waited till day. The narrative would have us understand that they left the sheep and went. Raising this point seems very childish, no doubt, but there is sense in the questions after all. The point is just this, that the ordinary duties have to be put to one side when the extraordinary revelation flashes in the sky. We must say that the revelation put before the

shepherds for the moment a higher duty, which may have led to the abandonment of the lower. As a matter of fact, the sheep seem to have suffered no harm by the absence of the shepherds. And suppose they had suffered harm—suppose they had all been killed. Would the loss of a few sheep have been too great a price to pay for the privilege of the revelation which that night came to the shepherds? No doubt this point raises a smile with some, but all such need to remember how many persons meet the command to go over the hill to the manger at Bethlehem with the question, “Who is to look after the sheep?” To which question the adequate reply is, When the vision points toward Bethlehem it is not a matter of absolute necessity that anybody look after the sheep.

Then the sign itself—how in keeping with the divine method is the direction to seek for a King in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger? Wonder-loving human nature, if

left to itself, would seek the marvelous in the unusual and would try to seek the unusual with the marvelous. "Show us the Father," said Philip, "and it sufficeth us." He desired a glimpse of God on a throne. He would have liked truth in some more spectacular form than in a human life. The shepherds might have sought a king elsewhere if they had not been given this definite direction, for, simple-hearted and truth-loving as they were, they would hardly have thought of swaddling clothes and manger as marks of royalty. One of the messages that shepherds need is that they are to seek for God's coming in lowly circumstances. There is in most of us a false humility which leads to skepticism of the simple and common revelations which are made nearest us. We do not really believe the voices in our very presence to be prophetic. We have not learned how to sanctify the ordinary by conceiving of it as a means by which God can speak to us. We are not only skeptical

of the importance of that which lies closest at hand, but we are also a little skeptical as to whether God can do much with the ordinary. There is a trace of unworthy skepticism of God in our search for signs. God has sometimes to send angels to the shepherds to help them see the value of men like themselves. He uses the extraordinary to enforce the importance of the ordinary. He puts strange lights in the heavens to start men to looking into mangers. He sets the angels singing to teach men the significance of an infant's cry.

And lest we seem to have trifled with the serious responsibilities of daily life by suggesting, perhaps at too great length, that there are occasions when the ordinary duty has to be ignored, we hasten to remark that, according to the story of these wonderful shepherds, they returned to their flocks when they had finished their task of paying honor to the Christ at Bethlehem. We have said all along that they were more than shep-

herds. Now we say that they must have been better even as shepherds from having seen and listened to the angelic voices. These wise shepherds did not feel any call to abandon their ordinary tasks after the visit to Bethlehem. They do not seem to have given themselves any new dignities because of the great experience through which they had passed. They told the story with such simple effectiveness that it has come down to us to-day. They did nothing to exaggerate their own part. They were so modest that we have to read between the lines to see how thoroughly our knowledge of the message of the midnight skies is due to their alertness and their open-heartedness. They did not seek even to preserve their names in connection with the story. They went back to their flocks, to be shepherds, no doubt, to the end, and we may well believe better shepherds than those who were shepherds and nothing more. The fields took on a new sacredness because of the vision they had

seen in them. Their work was more dignified in their own sight because the divine revelation which had reached off to the distant wise men had not failed to touch the shepherds, just over the brow of the hill. There was more joy, more poetry, more divinity about their work than ever before. They were better shepherds because they were more than shepherds.

THE BOY JESUS

THE BOY JESUS

Luke ii, 52

THE one word which best describes the life of the boy Jesus as that life is set before us in the gospel is *naturalness*. The early believers who thought to fill the gaps in the Gospels with imaginary narratives of a boy who could touch clay pigeons into life or bring out of a vat filled with blue coloring mixture red and yellow cloths entirely missed the point. They did not see the life of Jesus in its naturalness. If they had understood the real humanity of the growing Christ they would have seen that there is no real gap in the narrative. There is silence, to be sure, but just such silence as is natural to any career in its stages of preparation. It would certainly have been unnatural for Christ to have broken the silence of a normal boyhood

with such astoundingly grotesque feats of magic as the writers of the apocryphal Gospels attribute to Him.

There is no gap in the narrative of the early life of Jesus. In the few verses which comprise our present basis for discussion there is really a lavish wealth of material for the understanding of the life of the youthful Christ. Every detail enforces this characteristic of naturalness which can be taken as the key word of the story. The boy Jesus goes up to the city with His parents. He has the same natural curiosity which marks every boy, except that where the merely human boy gazes with absorbed attention upon camels and soldiers and fig sellers, the Divine Boy feels a passionate craving for the temple. The fires of sacrifice, the solemn chants, the ceremonies of the priests, all claim His attention till He loses thought of Himself and of the parents who have brought Him to Jerusalem. With the same activity with which the merely human boy would ask

questions about camel-driving and weapon-wielding, Jesus plies the priests. The same intuitive quickness which other boys show in grasping the secrets of the street scenes that arouse the boy-wonder Jesus shows in lighting upon the meaning of the problems which the doctors are discussing. In hearing the teachers and in asking them questions, in gazing into the faces of the worshipers, in sympathizing with the men who had evidently come to the temple seeking help for troubled hearts, Jesus finds a profound satisfaction which makes Him feel more completely at home than in Joseph's house at Nazareth. It is this feeling of being at home which gives us the clue to the meaning of the much-misunderstood word to His mother. We are not to put a touch of unfilial independence in the question of Jesus to Mary, "How is it that ye sought Me?" He asks, "Where could I have been but in My Father's house?" It is as if an ordinary boy should have asked why his mother sought him anywhere else

than where the camel "ships" were coming in off the deserts or the Roman soldiers were busy at their drill. Jesus had forgotten Himself in His absorption with the temple just as the ordinary boy might forget himself in rapt contemplation of an Oriental street scene. Naturally His heart found satisfaction in whatever pointed toward God. The temple scene shows this spontaneous and natural longing of Jesus for the divine.

The inborn divinity of Jesus shows itself just as naturally in the presence of the glories of the temple life as inborn artistic taste would show itself in a genius brought at the age of twelve into a splendid art gallery. There was immediate spontaneous response to the divine suggestiveness of rite and symbol and priestly word. The narrative reveals to us clearly, however, that the natural divinity of Christ was also naturally and spontaneously human. Just the slightest touch of imagination will enable us to see in the one or two verses which summarize for us

the life of Jesus at Nazareth a wonderfully full picture of a lovable and spontaneous youthfulness.

First of all, we are told that the Child grew. We are to take these words for just what they say and what they obviously mean. They overthrow at one stroke the thought of Christ which makes Him God living behind a mask of flesh without really entering into human experiences. The conception that the Son of God gave up nothing of the heavenly life in becoming a man is not drawn from the Scriptures. We have here, too, the death-blow to that pestilent, practical heresy which holds that there is anything to stunt full and normal growth in early turning to God. The life of the Boy Jesus was on the physical side like the life of the ordinary Nazareth boy. The parable which afterward told of the children playing at wedding and funeral in the market-place was probably a reminiscence of the streets of Nazareth. In any case, it reveals a sympathy with childhood

which must have come from the Master's having been a real Boy.

We are told of the Master's wisdom. Wisdom consists more in knowing *how* than in knowing *what*. It means that from the early years Jesus began to show a tactful skill in dealing with men and things which marked Him out as wise. The practical heresy that there must be a departure into sin for the sake of knowledge gets its final blow here. The youth sometimes feels that the sinners are the wise men—that the scoffers know more about life's real philosophy and the wordlings more about practical success than those whose feet have never left the correct path. Jesus knew what was in man and what was in the world without sowing wild oats.

We are next told that Jesus grew in favor with man. We get here a glimpse of His early popularity. He had the favor of the community in which He lived. This is one of those sidelights which uncover vast

stretches at a single flash. We have only to look at the kind of youth universally unpopular to know some characteristics Jesus had not. Men do not like precocious youth: Jesus was not precocious, in spite of His thirst for knowledge. Men do not like the conceited youth: Jesus was not conceited. Men do not like aloofness or superciliousness: Jesus had neither of these. Men do not like a censorious spirit: Jesus was without censoriousness. In short, every characteristic which can be looked upon as universally making for unpopularity was lacking in Jesus. The people of Nazareth thought well of the youthful Jesus. Of course, Jesus became unpopular in after years, but this was because of the heroic adoption of a course against public opinion rather than because of personal peculiarities.

There was nothing in the divinity of Jesus to make unnecessary His subjection to Mary and Joseph. He was natural in the sense that He needed them. Joseph and

Mary must have had great confidence in the ability of Jesus to take care of Himself, for they went a day's journey homeward from Jerusalem without asking what had become of their Son. They thought that He was as well able as any boy of His age to take care of Himself, but they recognized His dependence upon them in spite of their consciousness of His exceptional character, as that had been revealed to them, and they no doubt gave the best of themselves to the training and discipline of Jesus. We are to think of the influence of the parents as of great efficiency in awakening Jesus for the plan of God for Him. What we know of Mary convinces us that she was personally devout, a patriotic lover of Israel, submissive to the will of God as that was revealed to her. Joseph was a just man, likewise devout. The few references to him are all consistent with each other, and give us the image of a man of profound thoughtfulness, without impatience or evil temper, anxious only to find and follow the path of righteousness.

The word in our text which is translated "increased" in one version and "advanced" in the other, means "to lengthen by hammering," as an iron worker lengthens a bit of iron by pounding it upon the anvil. We have no desire to push etymological suggestions beyond reasonable limits, but the primary significance of this word makes it permissible for us to hint that the naturalness of the divinity of Jesus did not relieve Him of the necessity of learning in that severe school of experience, where the lessons seem actually beaten into our characters. The world is largely hammer and anvil for most of us. We are struck into shape with painful blows. If the tradition is correct that Joseph died shortly after this trip to Jerusalem, we can readily see that one hammer on the character of Jesus was the struggle for daily bread. Quite likely, too, there were lessons which His intelligence had to master, not by the swift intuition which showed itself in the temple, but by the more laborious process of

intellectual hammer-swinging. And if Christ had temptations after the scene in the desert He may certainly have had them before. In severe inward struggle He may have taken some steps toward moral maturity.

THE WORD BECOME FLESH



THE WORD BECOME FLESH

John i, 14

IN the beginning was the Word. It is a great thing to have a word standing at the beginning of any great enterprise. A word means definiteness of purpose. In the beginning was not a vague idea, not a mystic and inexpressible feeling, not a half-conscious impulse, but a Word. We say to the schoolboy that he does not grasp his thought until he can express it. The Son was the Word which God was uttering from the beginning, or rather from eternity.

How close is the Son to God? How close is Christ to the Father? As close as a word to its utterer. How close am I to my words? Physically, as close as I am to the air which I draw in and give forth in articulated sound. Mentally, as close as I am to my own thought. The Son was nearer to God than this. Some-

times I do not understand my own thought. I use words beyond myself. The Father understands the Word with perfect knowledge. Sometimes I may not be sincere and my words may be morally apart from myself. There is no such moral gap between God and the Word. Sometimes my words seem impersonal and dead. I wish I had the power to breathe upon them and make them live. God eternally breathes His life into the Word and the Word is the Son—God's Companion forever.

The author is trying to make clear, first of all, the truth that this Word is a word about Christ. The life which the followers of Jesus had seen was not a life which had begun at Bethlehem. Only the earthly career had begun there. The life itself had been the Word which God had been speaking from eternity. In the life of Christ men had overheard God speaking the Word which is in His mind forever. The life of Christ grew on the first followers as they meditated.

Mark sees the career which started when Jesus began His preaching journeys. Matthew puts the beginning back to David: the royal line has flowered out into consummate expression. Luke traces the beginning back to Adam: in Christ the whole race has found its crown. John sees the eternal in the life of Christ and hears the Word which is forever with God.

In forever uttering the eternal Word God is revealing Himself. The Word was God, we are told. The Word was the complete utterance of God, spoken out of God's own heart. What was God saying to Himself in the long ages before man came? He was uttering the Word, which for us is Christ. In the Christ life we see the picture which filled the mind of God from eternity. In the Word we see the Companion whom God must have had as the object of His eternal gaze. Shall I say that I have no time to think about the Eternal Christ? God has been thinking about Him supremely forever.

It was through the utterance of the Eternal Word that the world was made. The world is merely the material setting for the inner meaning of the Word. If we do not see that the world is for the revelation of a word we are lost, as lost as a butterfly would be that might fly through an open window and alight upon a printing press. The butterfly could make nothing of the printing press until it mastered the mystery of a word. If we do not see that the world is for the revelation of *the* Word we are lost. No other word is worth revealing. If God is not like Christ, and if the world is not made for the setting forth of the spiritual glories of the Christ, it is of no consequence what God is like, or what the world is made for. We can not understand in detail what all the parts of our strange world are for even after we know that they are for Christ; but if we know that they are for Christ, we can wait for the details. What, then, were the long ages of details for before men came? For

the Word, which is Christ. What are the vast mysteries of creation for? For Christ. What are pain and sorrow for? For Christ. One day we shall see all the parts of the universe contributing each its share to bring out into clear vision the rich suggestiveness of the Eternal Word. The word is a great instrument for speaking and painting and singing and sculpturing and bodying forth the wealths of meaning in the Word. Some of the brushes have not yet begun to paint, and some of the instruments are not yet attuned, but each will perform its appropriate work in its appointed time. The Christ life is the one word which justifies and explains the universe. Christ is the heart of the world's meaning. As we look upon the dark features of the physical system we may well despair until we consider the Word. We can never long think meanly of a world of which Christ is the explaining Word. The many races of the world, also, and their forlorn and backward condition, the hard lot of in-

dividuals—all this would be intolerable to our minds if we could not feel that Christ is the Word back of all. We do not yet understand the full meanings of the Word. When we do all things will fall into ordered system in our thought.

The Word came into our life to throw light upon the meaning of life. The life was the light of men. If the Word had been merely a combination of vocal sounds, or of printed characters upon a page, it would have solved but few problems for us. The great difficulty of profound conceptions is to get them beyond the stage of being merely written or spoken and to body them out into life. When the idea can be lived most of its difficulties to the understanding disappear. Much of our trouble in theology comes from forgetting that the Word of God lived in the life of Jesus and from carrying the Word back from the life condition to the merely abstract, or spoken condition. If we looked to the life, and not merely to the mark on

the page, if we caught the spirit rather than the letter, we would see many puzzles solving themselves. If we are merely thinking of words on a page, and hence if the problem is chiefly an intellectual problem to us, we can get into grievous enigmas in considering such a theme as the incarnation, for example. If we can come under the spell of the life we can see how natural and inevitable it was that the Son of God should come into human life. The Cross is a great stumbling-block apart from the Life. Once come into touch with the Life, and we see that the Life can not stop short of any self-sacrifice. Immortality is surrounded with dubious questionings so long as the Word is only a book word; but when the Word is seen as the Life, and the Life is once felt, the inevitableness of immortality is apparent. It is impossible that such fullness of life should be quenched by a merely physical event like death.

The author becomes still more definite. The Word is not only life, but flesh. It has

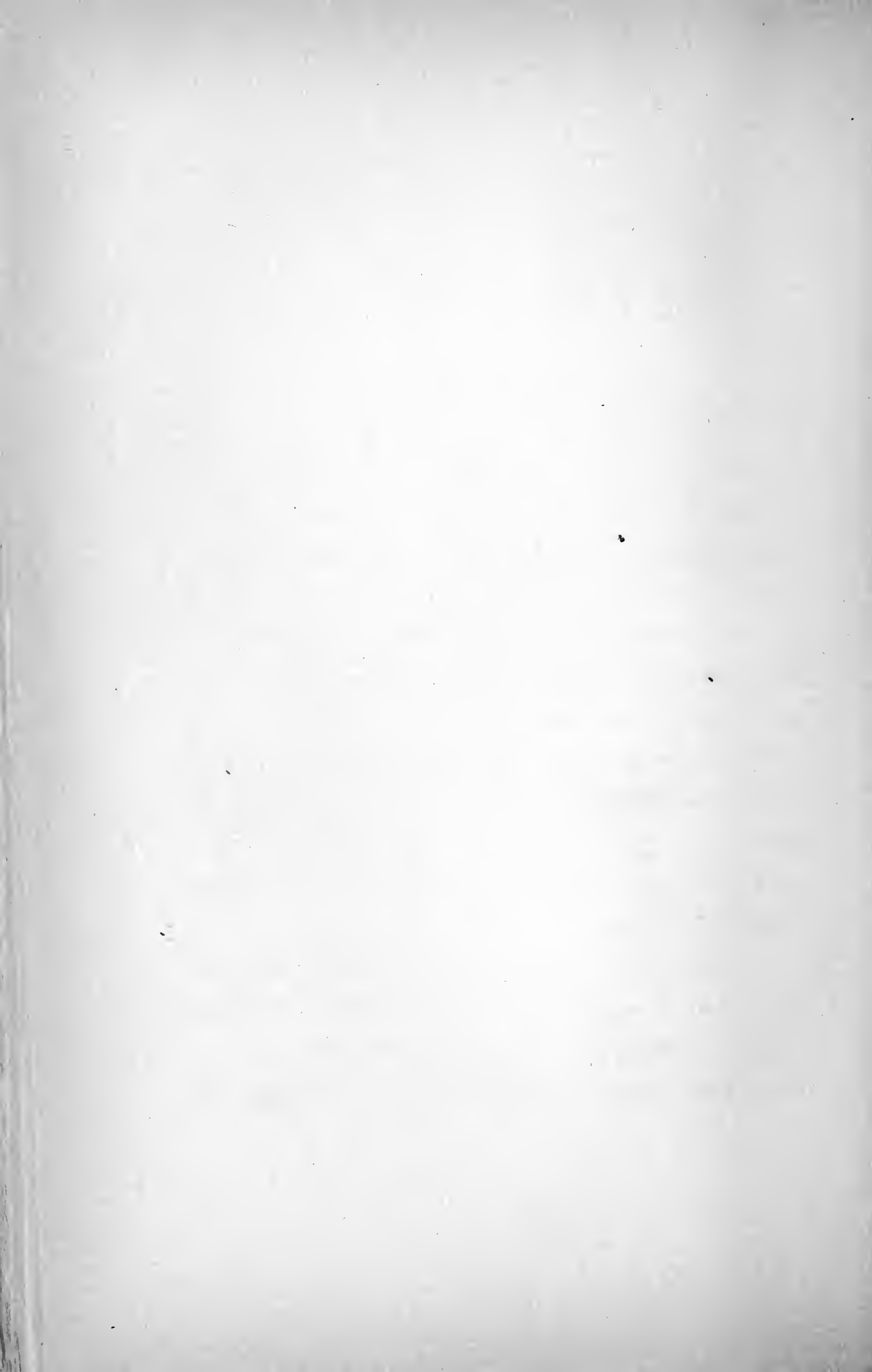
become visible to human eyes. It has moved out of the world of spirit and become a force in the realm of matter. Flesh means a definite connection with the material universe—a set of relations to be established with a system of things. The Word is not to touch human life in a vague or general way. The Word become flesh is to occupy so much of material space and is to move from one place to another. The word which originally spoke only to the ear of the spirit is now to become actually audible—is to speak with a voice which starts the actual air in motion. Then comes the sadder thought that even so some will not hear. The sorrow of the cross breathes through this majestic passage. Flesh means not only the power to give impressions, but to receive them as well. The Word become flesh is not only capable of starting new forces into the life of the world, but of receiving new pains from the world.

The word translated “dwelt” means

“tabernacled” or “lived in a tent” among us. It will not do to force suggestions into words by stress upon their etymological significance, but the suggestion of the tent is helpful in picturing the condescending love of the Eternal Son. The thought is of a Life which overflowed the entire universe, coming down to dwell in human conditions as in a tent. Compared to the appropriate dwelling-place of the Eternal Word the sum of human conditions is like a shifting fragile tent in the desert. The language of the skies which alone is adequate to express the Eternal Word is as much vaster than the poor, paltry human speech which Christ was forced to use as a palace is vaster than a tent. The human modes of thought, the human feelings, the human institutions of Christ’s time seem fearfully poor dwelling places for the Eternal Wisdom. The greatness of the sacrifice of Christ appears in this thought of His coming into human life as into a tent; and the greatness of His glory appears in His

sending out light through every crack and seam. Coming to His life, to keep to the figure here used, is like coming across a desert at midnight to find light streaming across the waste places from the hospitable lamps of a kindly tent. If we look upon the life into which Christ came from the standpoint of the higher privileges which would have been appropriate to Him, the conditions seem as plain and prosaic as a tent at midday. If we look upon the Life, radiant with the grace and truth, from the standpoint of our human needs, it is as beautiful as the lighted tent of a hospitable shepherd to a wayfarer lost at midnight.

THE POVERTY OF CHRIST



THE POVERTY OF CHRIST

2 Corinthians viii, 9.

CHRIST, who was rich, for our sakes became poor, Paul tells us. The text is an appeal for a collection, and is written with a practical motive. If Christ could do without worldly goods for the sake of us, we ought to be willing to give for the relief of the distress around us. This is the immediate message of the text. Farther down in the depths is a message for the theologians. For them the poverty of Christ has to do with profound speculations as to what qualities and attributes the Eternal Son of God laid aside in becoming man.

Between the immediate meaning and the theological significance lies another message. Christ lived through all the essential phases of a true human experience, and in His life

felt more than once the pangs of an inner soul-impoverishment. These experiences bring Him even nearer to us than does the fact that He had not where to lay His head. We can spend this Christmas morning well in thinking of that poverty into which Christ came for our sakes.

Think of the sense of impoverishment that must have come to Jesus in connection with His inevitable surrender of certain spiritual delights. The secret of Jesus' lonely walks upon the mountains must have lain in His deep love for conversation with God—conversation, too, which could find no satisfying substitute in walks and talks with the most intimate of His disciples. Christ was fitted in Himself for steady and serene gaze upon truths which men never reach. The Mount of Transfiguration gives us a glimpse of life which must have been perfectly normal to Him. While Peter and James and John were stupefied with terror, the Master's delight shone in eye and face. All these joys

of the mountain Christ gave up that through His poverty we might become rich.

Imagine a great artist gazing out over majestic landscapes which he loves. For the mere spectator one glance at mountain and meadow and sky and sea is enough. Not so with the artist. His soul is never full. For him the scene has ever new shades of meaning. This artistic seer, however, feels the calls to artistic prophecy. He must teach inferior minds the beauty spread out before them. The peculiarities of each pupil must be noted, and cause and cures of dullness must be learned, the power to beget enthusiasm must be acquired. The artist may give himself even to matter-of-fact drudgery with a sort of stolid delight, but there must come times when he misses the summer afternoons of quiet musing on the hillsides. Though Jesus made glorious even the dustiest details of His life with the light of a great divine significance, He can hardly have been really human if He never felt a sense of loss as

He yearned for uninterrupted brooding over the vaster reaches of the Father's truth.

Again, Jesus gave up at the start the thought of working through perfect instruments. The tools upon which Jesus was forced to rely must have brought to Him at times a feeling of wretched poverty. Take the instrument which we call human speech. Its imperfections as the medium of revelation appear constantly in crude misunderstandings and in perennial wranglings over interpretations. No doubt language seems a great instrument to us who have never learned to use it to its full powers, but how must it have seemed to a transcendent intelligence like that of the Master? Quite likely strings stretched across a tortoise-shell were very satisfactory to the first musicians, but how would such an instrument seem to a master of the modern violin? Moreover, while Jesus loved His own and loved them to the end, is it conceivable that there never came moments when Jesus longed

for apter disciples and more supple-minded apostles? These human instruments through whom His kingdom was to come—with what slowness they responded to His forgings and temperings! With what a sense of poverty the Leader must have looked at times upon His lieutenants!

We get a glimpse, too, of the poverty of our Lord when we consider even the physical limitations under which He wrought. The longest day has but twenty-four hours, and a man in the flesh can not be in more than one place at one instant. With the realization that activity, to be effective, must be limited in its sphere, there must come to all of us a sort of sense of cramping poverty. Other men just as worthy of help lie outside our farthest reach. There were many lepers in Judea and Galilee in the days of Jesus, but to none of them was Jesus sent, save only a few. Jesus must have caused almost as much sorrow as joy in His work as a Healer. When Peter came at Capernaum with the

report, "All men seek for Thee," Jesus responded by starting for the next towns. In that pursuing crowd were many blind and lame and sick, whose bitterest disappointment to the day of death was the memory of the Mighty Healer fleeing to the next towns while they were almost within reach. The thought must have been even more agonizing to Jesus Himself.

Not only were there some things which Jesus gave up at the start as unattainable under the circumstances of His poverty, but there were also some things that He strove after and sometimes failed to get. These failures must have increased His feeling of poverty.

Jesus was a Preacher. Before the preacher himself can feel any satisfying sense of success he must experience the inspiration of cordial listenings on the part of his hearers. The preacher may have tarried for hours in contemplative study, the theme may seem to him most worthy, but if that peculiar quicken-

ing something which comes from a receptive audience be lacking, the preacher feels poor indeed. True, the multitudes at times heard Jesus gladly. At times they enriched the heart of the Great Preacher with the magnetic and enkindling re-enforcement of their listening. But at other times they were dull, or indifferent, or hostile. A rough and sturdy son of thunder cast out of the synagogue at Nazareth might have sustained himself with a robust contempt for hearers who could thus receive a great sermon. Jesus was sturdy, and He, too, could feel contempt, but as He saw the wild ruffianism which greeted His message of good news to the people of Nazareth, He must have felt that distressing poverty which comes to a prophet whose words lack nothing save a kindly audience.

Jesus could not always get confidence when He sought for it. Sometimes when He tried to heal the sick He could do but little because of their unbelief. It is the old story

of the impoverishment of a leader through the lack of confidence in him. What keeps business moving? Is it the amount of coin in circulation? Or is it the opening of new markets? These, of course, play their part, but the great creator of industrial prosperity is the confidence which men have in one another. The surest way to pull down the wealth of a great financier is to attack confidence in him. Now, just as a business man falls under the load of an awful poverty when the confidence of other men in him departs, so Jesus must have experienced a burden like the consciousness of inner poverty when He was unable to get that confident response to faith without which He could not bring spiritual wealth to men. The saddest failures of all come when, through no fault of their own, rich men see the confidence upon which all depends fall away. It was a sad moment in the life of Jesus when, through the unbelief of the masses and of individuals, the rich treasures which He had for the redemp-

tion of men became for the moment valueless in His hands.

Of real appreciation Jesus received but little. He sought for adequate appreciation of the good things He brought to men, but even from the most intimate disciples He found but little. If all beside the owner of a diamond cared no more for diamonds than for pebbles, the diamond itself would not necessarily shrink in value in the regard of the owner, but the owner would surely feel poor without his neighbor's appreciation of his priceless stone. Just so a thinker longs for appreciation for the revelation which he brings, and without that appreciation he knows the pangs of an inner hunger more insistent than the tortures of starving flesh. The teaching of Jesus, loaded as it was with overwhelming significance, was not appreciated even by those who welcomed every word from the Master's lips. The parables, flashing back the light from their many angles, seem veritable spiritual jewels to us, but to

the disciples they were riddles, hard sayings, paradoxes. Nor did the direct statements fare better. When Jesus said, "I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world; again I leave the world and go unto the Father," the disciples responded with that too ready applause which sometimes is such unmistakable confession of a complete missing of the point, "Lo, now speakest Thou plainly, and speakest no parable." With the sad realization that the disciples did not even faintly understand the deep truth which He had spoken, the Master continued: "Do ye now believe? Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave Me alone."

There is a note of poverty, too, in Jesus' word, "I have many things to say to you, but ye can not bear them now." It is part of the impoverishing humiliation of teaching that a teacher must say over and over again the merest elements when he longs to lead

his pupils to richer and broader fields. A band of learners is somewhat like a fleet of war vessels in one particular. If they are to move together, the speed is set by the slowest vessel in the one case and by the slowest mind in the other. Minds and hearts were not strong enough during the stay of Jesus on earth to receive the truth which He would gladly have given. Jesus complained as He thought of the wealth of life in Himself and of the inability or unwillingness of men to receive that life. It was as if a fertile field, shut in by surrounding mountains, with no road out to the larger world, should feel poor because it must give itself to the limited crops which are all that the dwellers within the barriers can use. Jesus could bring forth with infinite abundance the things which men most need, but there was no road for these riches into the minds of men. Or, if I may say so, there was no market for the fine and luxuriant harvest of the mind of Jesus.

It goes without saying that Jesus could get no large measure of personal sympathy in those moments when the burden was so great that He felt desperately alone. He found Peter and James and John asleep when all that He asked was that they keep awake. Men could not understand His sorrow. To the heavy-fibered it would be a great mystery to find a man weeping at the thought of a sorrow of thirty years ago. The grief of the heavy-fibered does not last through thirty years. Similarly, if Jesus had tried to explain to His disciples the depth of His sorrow for the sins of the whole world, they would have been of all men the most mystified.

We realize something more of the poverty of Christ when we think of some of His losses. He lost, necessarily lost, that force of public opinion which for an instant in the opening of His career showed itself in His favor. He felt for a moment the plunge of the Niagara power within His grasp, and then He delib-

erately allowed it to fall away. He lost disciples, too, who through days and weeks had walked with Him, disciples who had been at least measurably effective in preaching and in healing and in casting out devils. There came a time when some of them turned back and walked no more with Him. Superficial they no doubt were, but they left a heavy-hearted Christ when they turned away. Many went professing grievous disappointment, but they carried away not so much grief as they left behind. And, direst loss of all, Jesus lost one of the twelve. He who made himself the son of perdition might have been one of the sons of light. None were lost "save one," but that one was lost. In His solicitude for that one, Jesus shows a depth of poverty-stricken woe which reaches to the very heart of God. God's universe is poorer with Judas out of his place.

Finally, we get one further hint as to the poverty of Jesus by thinking of some impoverishing knowledge which He was forced

to possess. There is some land on this globe so poor that the more one has of it the poorer one is. There is also some knowledge that likewise makes the knower poorer. The more we read some books the poorer we are. The books may be true, but the facts may be of the impoverishing kind. The missionary to a foreign land must learn the heathen conception of God; he must, for the time of learning at any rate, think of dragons and vipers. This is a part of the secret of redemption, the striving to get near enough to the heathen's conception to lift it to something higher. So Jesus had to look upon the miserable and wretched conceptions which prevailed in His day; He endured the humiliation of considering all manner of mistake and aberration and artificiality. Worse than all this, He was forced to come in close contact with the evil in men. He knew what was in man, for He saw it there. The redeemer of a tropical swamp must go down into the midst of the deadly vapors, and come close to the

poison of weed and fang. The Redeemer of the bodies of men must not draw back from the unsightly and grewsome. The Redeemer of the souls of men did not shrink from the touch of sinners. One realm of awful knowledge God spares us from, namely, the world's iniquity as in its dreadful total He has seen it from the beginning. From the sight of humanity's sin as it lies before His eyes He mercifully delivers us. And He never sanctions our seeing the sin as it exists around us, save as our seeing will help banish the evil. God is not a realist in the sense that He is willing for His children to acquire any and all kinds of knowledge, if only the knowledge be "true to life." Some knowledge which is true to life leads to death. The agony of Jesus in Gethsemane was in part the shrinking of a sinless soul, already sickened by the world's manifestations of evil, from the further evil yet to appear. Sin was so awful to Jesus that vivid realizations of its presence seemed for the moment to separate Him

from God. Hence the impoverished cry of Calvary, "Why hast Thou forsaken Me?"

After all, then, the Savior's poverty had to do with a manifold sense of impoverishment of a deeper kind than inconvenience and even suffering through the lack of material goods. He was willing to submit Himself to this inner and deeper poverty that we through His poverty might become rich. And if we have moments when we must give up, or can not get, or must lose certain precious possessions of an inner and deeply vital value, it ought to help us to remember that even here Christ is our Leader. He has gone down into the valley of even these shadows.

THE IMMORTAL GIFT



THE IMMORTAL GIFT

Matthew xxvi, 13

WHEREVER the gospel is preached the breaking of the flask of ointment shall be told, said Jesus. There can be no doubt about the fulfillment of the prophecy. Here we are in a land which was nineteen hundred years ago a dreary wilderness, in a continent then undreamed of, reading the story of the woman's offering. The breaking of the box of ointment is worthy of being told to the last of earth's inhabitants, for it tells in acted parable the whole gospel, and immortalizes the kind of gift which gives the charm to Christmas.

The incident is worthy of perpetual remembrance as symbolizing the pressure of divine love for outward manifestation. It seemed to the disciples wildly foolish that

the woman should make such an extravagant offering to Jesus. They did not understand the inevitableness with which love seeks a vent. We have in the incident a clue to the understanding of the love of God in the gift of His Son. Understand the throbbing love that could not be pent up without explosion! The love would either break out into expression or the heart itself would break. So the love burst out into extravagant expression through the shattered box and the escaping ointment. Understand the love of God for His children, and the most costly gift which He can make—even the gift of His only begotten Son—becomes inevitable. We talk about the difficulties in the way of the Incarnation, and miss the point through not seeing this insistent irrepressibleness of love. A hard-headed thinker will tell us that the Incarnation is as impossible as water running up hill, but his reasoning goes down before the attractive spell of a love which plays upon the Father's heart like the force of the

moon upon the sea, and in spite of the philosopher's objections, fills human life with the inrushing God.

Again, the Master saw in this act a suggestion of the leap toward poverty which so expressed His own life. All the slow hoardings of the years gone at a stroke! For this the woman had labored; for this the caravan had toiled across the desert; for this the artificer in India had wrought—that the precious ointment might be wasted at one stroke! Yes, all this is true, and this is the glory of the story. If the gospel means anything, it means that for our sakes Christ became poor. He descended into the deep sadness of our lot; He looked out upon life through our experiences; He put Himself sympathetically into all our sufferings. Men can not thus impoverish themselves. They can not really put themselves into each other's places. We are all more or less like that social experimenter of a few years ago who for many months turned aside from the luxury of his own home

to live among the lowly; earning his bread as they did, sharing the privations for the sake of understanding them. After the experiment, the student confessed that he had been only measurably successful, that even in the closest contact he could not sympathize as he wished with those whose lot he was trying to learn. He could not forget that he could leave them at any time. Christ, on the other hand, threw Himself so completely into human life that He made men's sufferings His own with a certainty and completeness which are the marvel of the ages. He could leap into the poverty of our condition, exhausting Himself in the pouring forth of the life which makes us rich.

There is rich meaning, too, in the thought of a perfume going forth into the air as a symbol of the gospel of Christ. We are so taken up with the common aspects of the work of Christ that we do not always see its more precious and finer characteristics. The gospel is a box of ointment of great

price, the odor of which goes forth upon the air of a hard world. The fragrance may have a sort of evanescence—it may be only at rare moments in the life of the nation or of the individual that the fine perfume is detected, but these fugitive moments are treasures above all others. The man of dull sensitiveness knows nothing about these rarer incidents of the godly life. They are not for him, or, rather, he is not for them. The fragrance is around him, but he knows not of its existence. For him whose sense of religious values and significance is at all keen, however, the odor of the precious ointment intoxicates and thrills the mind with its stimulating revelation of eternal glories. In the closing lines of "Snowbound," Whittier speaks of the thanks that are to him like

"Odors blown,
From unseen meadows newly mown."

To one, the fragrance from the newly mown meadow means only hay. To another, the

odor itself brings to the gaze the unseen field, and perhaps carries the thought back to memories of other days. Just as the fragrance that comes through an open car-window will annihilate the years and carry the soul back to the early happiness, so the odor of the ointment from the broken box, and the finer spiritual fragrance which it suggested and typified, carried the mind of Jesus to the Father and to that love which is the very foundation of His kingdom. For the instant, the glories of an existence before the worlds were may have burst upon His view. Shut in upon earth's dusty roadway, He nevertheless caught gleams of the summer fields of glory just beyond the fringes of His human life. And so to us also the escaping fragrance of an exalted act of self-sacrifice—foolish and even absurd as it may seem to the standpoint of low common sense, transitory and evanescent as it may be—brings the real revelations of the eternal glory. The memory of such joys is of more value to us

than many books of argument, of many days of merely routine good works. It is when we get to the conception of the high fineness of self-sacrifice for its own sake that we are prepared to understand the Master's commendation of this apparently impractical and reckless pouring forth of the costly ointment. The ointment was not in one sense a necessity to the nourishment of the mind of Jesus, but it transported Him into realms of the highest joy.

The incident shows also the immense though unconscious wisdom of love. It is clear from the comment of Jesus that the woman did just the appropriate thing. She was not conscious of the wisdom of the deed, but she did wisely in trusting her love. "She hath come beforehand to anoint My body for burial," said Jesus. This does not mean that she had a purpose consciously in mind. She simply gave herself up to the expression of her feeling for the Master, and the event proved that she could not have acted more

wisely if she had planned to do something altogether fitting to the particular circumstance in the life of Jesus. And Jesus gave her the credit of the result. He spoke as if she had clearly foreseen the death and had come to prepare the body for the approach of its awful experience. She trusted to what we might call a blind impulse, and got the credit for a clear purpose. Just as we look upon the work of the founders of our Republic and give them credit for results which they could not have possibly foreseen, so Jesus looked upon the deed of the woman and rewarded her. Just as it was wise for the founders of the nation to cast themselves out upon the current of an instinct toward freedom, just as it was wise for this woman to trust her impulse toward the costly manifestation of feeling, so it is wise for us to rely upon the feelings that sometimes prompt us away from what we are ordinarily accustomed to look upon as sensible and practical. The principle that economy is a great waste

is especially true when it applies to the expression of affection.

The Master put the expression of interest and love for Himself above the giving of alms. This is a great surprise to the practical man. And yet the lesson is of eternal value. There are even to-day some who are more truly the representatives of Christ to us than are the poor. It is glorious to be a supporter of philanthropies, but this is not so glorious as to show love for the life-companion or the children or the intimate friend. The poor we shall have always, but these we shall have not always. The man who has visited the sick and given water and bread to the hungry need not think that he has thereby honored Christ if he has let year by year go by without the manifestation of interest and love for those who stand intimately before him as the nearest representatives of Christ. It is just as wise from the higher standpoint to allow an extravagant outburst of feeling for these as to give to the poor.

It may be that we have not thought of Christ as especially dependent upon appreciation. We have failed to see that the higher up men go toward God the more dependent they are upon the appreciation of their fellows. This does not mean that they are of the class of those sensitive souls who can not work if the spirit of their friends is not altogether cordial to them, but it does mean that the highest characters are those who appreciate most the gift of human sympathy and affection. The strongest men are not those who go forth to work not caring what men think, but those who go forth caring what men think. There was nothing which this woman could give Jesus in a material form which would have been in itself of direct benefit to Him. He was not in need of riches. If she had handed over the three hundred pence "in cash," as we say, He would hardly have known what to do with it except to give it to the poor. There was nothing which she could communicate to Him in

the way of wisdom which would be of great help to Him. He needed that none should tell Him either how to preach the deep things of eternal life or proclaim the lowlier duties of the common task. There was nothing which the woman could give Jesus which would have large value apart from the spirit which the gift might manifest. The manifestation of the spirit, however, was worth a good deal more than the three hundred pence which the ointment cost. Finer and more pervasive than the fleeting odor which filled the room was the profound satisfaction which stole into the very heart of Jesus. Appreciation was all that men could give Jesus, but that appreciation was everything. Appreciation is all that men can give God, but that appreciation is everything to God. It must be so if we take at all seriously the teaching that we are the sons of God. God is in a sense dependent upon the appreciation of His children, just as an earthly father is dependent. This does not mean that the

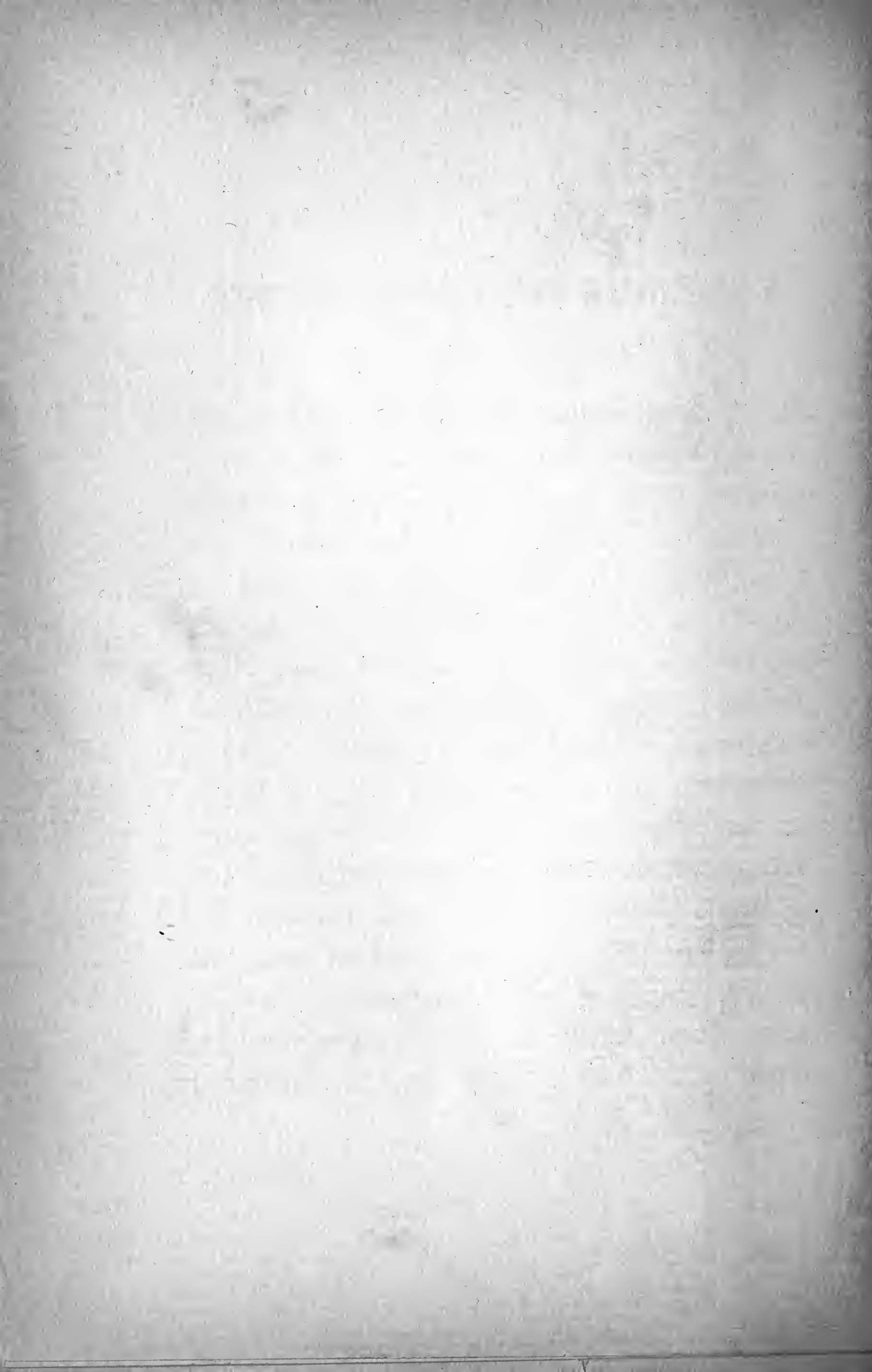
work of the universe can not go on if we do not show our appreciation, nor does it mean that God will be any wiser by the gift which we bring Him. It means that since the very center of God's life is feeling, that life will be richer if we make heart-return to Him. The higher up men go toward God the fuller becomes the life of feeling, the stronger the ties which set in sympathetic love toward humanity, and the realer the dependence of the heart upon the return of love from men.

It was with the thought of His approaching death before Him that Jesus accepted the offering. The offering must have made the bearing of the cross easier. We think of Jesus as really shrinking from the awful sorrow of Gethsemane and Calvary. The distress was a real distress and the shadow of the woe was upon Jesus as He sat in the house at Bethany. The galling thought in cross-bearing is very often the suspicion that nobody cares. One word of appreciation will

carry the cross-bearer through Gethsemane when the lack of that word may mean the throwing aside of the cross. In the agony at Gethsemane Jesus earnestly desired that the disciples watch and pray with Him for one little hour, but they slept instead of praying. Was Jesus, then, utterly bereft of human sympathy as He wrestled in the mysterious suffering? We do not see how He could have carried the load if He had been thus alone. No; the memory must have gone back to the moment at Bethany when the woman broke the box of ointment. She little thought what she was doing when she shattered the flask, but she was letting loose mightier forces than ever conjurer was fabled to have loosened from his magic box. What power there was in the perishing fragrance of the flask! Power enough to re-enforce the soul of the Master and carry Him through Gethsemane! Power enough to carry Him through the shock of Calvary! This is often the sting of sacrificial death—that nobody

cares! Nobody seems to care for the protest against sin, or for the contact with deadly evil, or for the pouring forth of love! The sustaining reflection with Jesus was that somebody on earth did care and appreciate. The cross stands ever at the center of the universe. The cross-bearers are still filling up that which is lacking in the suffering of Christ and of God. Happy are they who go to the sorrow sustained by the fragrance of the flask of ointment. These faint odor-waves would not have been thought strong from the standpoint of the world's practical idea of force, but they were powerful enough to lift the soul of Jesus above the submerging flood of sorrow and buoy His heart on to the victory. At the hour of supreme crisis just one pulsating wave of love may outweigh the massive forces which sway the suns.

THE GIFTS THAT NEVER COME



THE GIFTS THAT NEVER COME

Hebrews xi; Luke xi, 2-13

AS we meet at our Christmas festivities this week, we should not forget one class of persons of whom we are not apt often to think—those to whom Christmas brings the thought of gifts that never have come to them. As children, it may be, they did not receive the tokens of kindness that other children received. As youths they dreamed fine dreams which have not come true. They have seen one illusion after another break up and disappear. The Christmas season, with its idealism and romance, comes to them to mock them. It brings pain through recalling to them the good gifts of personal kindness and of fulfilled dreams which they have never received. A melancholy which those who have never known shattered

dreams can not understand comes upon them as they sit at the fireside on Christmas eve.

There are two passages of Scripture which ought to be full of comfort to all such disappointed hearts, provided, of course, they have still kept at least the elements of their faith in God. The first passage is the eleventh chapter of the Book of Hebrews. The second is that passage in the eleventh chapter of Luke where Christ tells of the Father's wisdom in giving good gifts to His children.

It would be altogether impossible to discuss the forty verses of this chapter of Hebrews within our limits, but one verse stands out before the others as containing the heart of the entire passage; around that verse all others turn. We refer to the thirteenth verse, "These all died in faith, not having received the promises." From the opening sentence of the chapter as to faith being the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen, down to the last sentence, the thought is of a faith which held fast in

repeated disappointments and came to find in the very faith itself the reward beyond the fulfillment of the earlier dreams. The patriarchs had started out from their homes to find a city with foundations. They did not travel into the desert because they liked the desert. They did not dwell in tents because they were fond of outdoor life. They were seeking a city, and a city which would endure—one that had foundations, whose Builder and Maker was God. They were forever on the move. Jacob raised himself on his staff to give his final blessing, and Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel and gave commandment concerning his bones. There is no attempt in this passage to disguise the hardships of the life of faith or to hint that the lot of the Christian is likely to be easy. There is something splendid in the appeal of Christianity to the hardier moral elements in human nature. None of the apostles held out promises of material reward or physical

ease in the life of the Christian. Jesus Himself did not do this. There is no record of His trying to attract men by the prospect of easy conquests; in fact, He many times discouraged men at the very beginning. A rich man came running to the Master to seek eternal life, and the Master imposed a condition which sent him away. To another He said that the Son of man had not where to lay His head; to another He declared that one who would go back to bury his own father could not expect to be His disciple. And the keynote of this great passage in Hebrews is that the heroes died in the faith, *not* having obtained the promises. The *not* is put there in full sight. At first we may feel that the *not* is a mistake. This is a strange argument for the life of faith—that those who had struggled for long years for the reward did not receive it. The writer goes on, however, to make himself clear: the heroes did not receive what they were looking for, but they found something better. In the midst of their

struggle they came to see that the very faith itself was the main reward, and that the faith kept pointing out beyond any possible earthly realization. The actual city, even if it had foundations, could never be enough. They came to see that a heavenly country was the only one that could fully satisfy the expectations that had grown through the years. Their disappointment did not sour nor embitter them; their souls were not worn out by seeing dream after dream fail of fulfillment; their heroic purpose so deepened and increased that in the end God Himself was not ashamed to be called their God.

Where is there another religious system which would dare tell of the hardships which may at any moment confront men as does Christianity? Where is there a system which dares tell men that every dream which they may dream of earthly success may at any moment come to naught if they follow the truth? To be sure, we all know that if men follow the teachings of Christ, they are in

the path of industrial and social advancement, but very often the dreams of such blessings do not come true in particular cases. The house may burn down, or the son die, or the dreadful illness come on the very day after the man has given himself to the cause of the Lord. The man may dream the largest dreams of earthly prosperity, with every dollar of the money to be devoted to the cause of Christ, and he may know defeat from the very moment he starts to realize his dream. Christianity dares to say this. It dares tell men that they must take up a cross, and it dares tell them that the cross will be put upon them even if they do not wish it. But it tells something more: it tells them that if they do not get an earthly city, they will get a heavenly. It tells them that they may even enter into the heavenly city here and now and find in spiritual conviction itself a peace that passeth understanding and a joy that the world can not take away. This is the whole of the Christian promise—if you

do not get what you are honestly seeking after, you will get something better. If you die in faith, having received the promises, well and good. If you die in faith, not having received the promises, better still, for this marks you off as the true hero. God is not ashamed to be your God. The day will come when you will be thankful for the influence upon you of the things you never received, though you sought earnestly for them.

The passage before us is one of the great classic utterances of all literature. To get its full force, however, we should try to see something of its eternal character—something of the way in which the experience of these heroes is forever repeating itself in the lives of those we most admire.

Here is a man who has an honest desire to accumulate wealth which is to be used in an honest way. He seeks for the money through the years. He plans night and day, always with the thought of the noble outcome in mind. Just as he is about to grasp

the prize, some calamity, natural disaster, or industrial panic comes upon him and scatters his forces. Has the man failed? If he keeps his faith, no. The prudence, the foresight, the self-control, the faith—these are his. Virtues like these count anywhere. They are the real gold of the kingdom. Faith which can hold on in spite of disappointment—the believer at last dying with his hopes undimmed—this faith is good coin in any realm in God's universe.

Here is a man busy with great problems that he feels he must solve for the good of men, a Christian thinker with the studies that may relieve the doubts of men. He works through the years and, it may be, dies without having found the light which he sought. Quite likely this will be the outcome, for some problems have been clamoring for solution ever since the days of the Greeks. It would be false to say that we are no nearer a solution now than then, for there has been advance, and great advance. But humanity

has not yet reached an answer to its questions. Shall we say, then, that the struggle has been in vain? Hardly. The training of mind and heart has not been in vain. The thinker himself is the best outcome of the thinking, just as Abraham was the best result of Abraham's faith. Those early thinkers who sought to turn lead into gold, or sought to read the stars to find their meaning for the individual life, were not all impostors. They sought, many of them, with an earnest purpose, and while they did not get what they sought, they put the world on the path to scientific research and showed by their own example the kind of persistency with which thinkers should search.

Suppose we step, now, into a higher realm and think of the direct search for God in prayer, which to some seems to end in disappointment. The saint prays many times and finds his prayer unanswered. He desires this or that in the way of direct answer and seems to come to naught. Is there, therefore,

no answer? Is not the patience which does not weary an answer? Is the faith which does not shrink an answer? How better can a man find favor with God than by refusing to be discouraged with God? Surely this must be a man of whom God can not be ashamed. This is the very glory of the heroes of Israel, that they believed in God when all appearances were against God; that is to say, when it seemed as if God had forsaken them. The friends whom we most value in this world are the ones who stick, even when we have to embark on courses which the friends can not understand.

We have now to touch upon the hardest problem of all. How is it when we fail to bring the city into the lives of others? The mother sees glories in the life of the son which she thinks can be brought out by her prayers, and she prays. The glories may not come, or, at least, sometimes do not come. Is the prayer vain? We do not pretend to say how joy shall one day be brought to

that mother's heart, but we are sure that if her faith fails not, she becomes a center of inspiration to scores of whom she may know nothing. The faith that can hold on in the face of disappointment like this—what glory it sheds upon those who stand by! The writer of these lines once knew a woman who nursed an invalid sister through forty years, waiting day after day for some ray of intelligence to break, receiving in response only the chatterings of an empty mind. The end finally came, and the sister saw the last hope vanish. Was the hope vain? Not from the standpoint of those who stood by and caught something of the glory of the heroic endeavor and who saw this forlorn hope led through the years. So with all our prayers. If the house be not worthy, the peace returns to him who sent it forth, and from him it sheds abroad its rays to all around. How the Almighty is to adjust all claims in the final day we do not know, but we do see something of the glory which comes into

human life through the discipline of a quest that ends in outward failure and inner victory.

“ ’T is not the grapes of Canaan that repay,
But the high faith that fails not by the way.”

Turning now to the passage in Luke xi, 13, we find this same general thought expressed by Jesus, even more irresistibly than by the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews. Christ's thought is that the Father knows *how* to give; whether we know how to ask or not, He knows how to give. This truth is to guide us in all our reflection upon God's gifts. If earthly fathers know *how* to give, says Jesus, much more does the Heavenly Father know how to give. Sometimes God's very wisdom and skill in giving prevent our seeing His gifts. It may be that God gives quietly, and the very quietness of the coming of the gift keeps us from seeing it. God does not give standing on the corners of the streets, nor does He sound a trumpet before Himself as He gives. He gives unobtru-

sively. God does not give as the professional philanthropist gives. He is not a philanthropist, but a Father. Modern charity, with its elaborate institutionalism, throws but little light on God's giving. We are not "cases" in God's sight, carefully numbered and recorded in a card-catalogue, our requests to be passed upon by a committee. We are children, and the gifts are the personal signs of a Father's love. Philanthropy, impersonal and institutional as much of it is, does not give us the how of God's giving. Again, the very greatness of God's way will obscure the fact of His gift if we do not look upon His dealings from the loftiest standpoint. He may grant a boon to America by changing conditions in China—He delights to act in this large way. Still further, His profound understanding of our needs must be thought of. He knows what is best, and is divinely skillful in bringing about that best. If a son should ask a father for a toy which the son could make himself, the father might

wisely respond by placing the appropriate tool in the boy's hand. God likewise sometimes answers our aspirations and dreams by sending us tools instead of finished products.

The one gift above all which the Father desires to give is His Holy Spirit. Now, it is absolutely inconceivable that God could withhold His Holy Spirit from one who had asked for that Spirit, just as it would be impossible to give the Spirit to one who cared nothing for the things of the Spirit. No matter what else we ask for, we can not have it unless we take also the Spirit of God. This is the accompaniment of all God's gifts. If the gift can not be given without the Spirit, the giving of the gift is impossible. If the gift is in harmony with the Spirit, the gift will come. If the gift is not in harmony with the Spirit of God, but the heart of the worshiper is in such harmony, the Spirit can come in increased abundance. In this case the Father refuses the petition, but sends a better gift. Suppose a son should

ask a stone of a loving father, or a scorpion, or a serpent? Could the father give it? If the son should ask a stone, the father would give bread. If he should ask a serpent, the father would give a fish. If he should ask a scorpion, the father would give an egg. This is not an artificial twisting of the Scriptures for the making of a far-fetched point. It is a fair statement of the way that God deals with us. Many of our desires are so ignorant and foolish that they are like petitions for stones, serpents, and scorpions. God sends bread, fish, and eggs instead. When we make a poor request through ignorance, He sends His Spirit. If we do not get what we ask for, we get something better. This would seem to be the legitimate summary of the Master's teaching about good gifts. Of course, we must remember that the same reliance upon God which we are to exercise in all phases of life, the steady faith in Him, even when we can not see Him, is to be exercised here. Even in answer to our

petition for the coming of the Spirit it may be that the Spirit will not come as we have expected. There may not be the sudden bursting light for which we have longed, or the revelation may be otherwise far different from what we have looked for. Still it is impossible for God not to give us the best of all His gifts if we ask for it, and the patience which prompts us to renew the petition in the face of seeming silence is, as we suggested above, not a merely reflex influence, but the direct gift of God's Spirit—as great and glorious a gift as any which we can receive and the sure token that the Spirit has already come.

**THE KINGDOM THAT COMETH
WITHOUT OBSERVATION**



THE KINGDOM THAT COMETH WITHOUT OBSERVATION

“The kingdom of God cometh not with observation.”—Luke xvii, 20

IT is easy enough to see the mistake of the Pharisees in the question to which the text of the morning is an answer. Jesus' use of the words “king” and “kingdom” was new. The words inevitably suggested to His hearers an actual material realm of some kind—a realm that could be located geographically. This thought that the kingdom of God ought to be “here” or “there” if it existed at all, was altogether natural. Jesus was from the beginning trying to put into the ordinary speech of His day a spiritual suggestiveness that came hard to His audiences. If Peter and James and John almost at the very last of the Master's earthly career

were in doubt because of the spiritual use of the words that they had always handled in a strictly matter-of-fact way, we certainly should be able to see at once how Pharisees and scribes could fail to understand this word as to the kingdom.

We have passed far away from the misunderstanding of the Pharisees—and of the disciples, too—for that matter. We see clearly just what Jesus meant. The kingdom of God cometh not with observation, for the sufficient reason that it is a spiritual kingdom. The things of the Spirit are not reached by eyesight. It does no good to try to locate the kingdom of God by the use of a map. We can not see souls. We can not see loves and aspirations and prayers and joys. These are in the invisible realm—and this we have come to understand.

But it is quite possible that there is a sense in which the kingdom is even more invisible than we have been accustomed to think. It may be that its coming is even more

intangible and invisible than the most truly spiritual among us imagine. The conception that the kingdom of the soul is the realm of the invisible realities is rather an elementary truth. Very possibly Jesus saw something still more in need of rebuke than gross crudeness like that of the mere beginners in Christian discipleship. It would seem that something further must have been before His thought as He spoke the words of the text. We so often think that the progress of a cause depends on our realization of the progress, we are so constantly given over to watching painfully and minutely all the signs of life in any movement to which we give ourselves, that it may be well that the Master enforced repeatedly the real inward pervasiveness and invisibleness of the kingdom. It may be, I repeat, that He was thinking, not of the mere elementary truth as to the invisibility of a soul-kingdom, but of some other truths also that must be kept in mind, even by the most advanced disciples; and on

this Christmas day it is well that we look beneath the mere surface signs of the coming of the kingdom.

The kingdom of God cometh not with observation. It may be that it makes very real advance without our being at all conscious of the progress. First of all, look at the dawning of religious consciousness in the child-life. On Christmas day at least we shall all readily admit that it is the will of God that there should never be sin, that from the very beginning the life of the growing child should unfold to an understanding of the will of God. Suppose, now, that this ideal should be more abundantly realized than we actually find it, what should we have? We should have the kingdom of God coming in generation after generation without great outward sign. That is to say, we should not be able to see the coming. The gradual unfolding in consciousness would be indeed so gradual, the response to religious instruction so subtle, the outward sign might be so completely

lacking, that we might put no date upon the time of its arrival. To take the illustration that comes to mind most naturally,—we believe that Jesus lived a perfectly true human childhood. We do not think of Him as toddling about the streets of Nazareth burdened with the consciousness of the fact that He was the Son of God come into the world for the redemption of men. He probably began conscious life just about as other children do,—with His mind busy with the world of sights and sounds about Him. He gradually awoke to a knowledge of Himself and of the work that He was called upon to do. Just when did Jesus awake to the fact that He was the Son of God? This was the most stupendous realization that ever dawned upon a human mind. When did this most stupendous fact dawn? There is absolutely no telling. We have theories, to be sure, but the theories can not settle the matter. When did Jesus first say to Himself, “I am the Son of God?” Was it one day as He played with

His Jewish companions on the Nazareth streets, or one afternoon as He returned from a boyhood stroll over the hills, or one evening as He knelt at the knee of His mother, or was it when He took that memorable trip to Jerusalem? You may have your guess about this matter, and I may have mine, but the simple fact remains that the greatest realization that ever has broken upon a human consciousness broke so gradually, or so quietly, that to this day we have nothing but theories as to the time of its arrival.

Now, in a world where the ideal could be completely realized this experience would be the ordinary one. The kingdom of God,—in the sense of a realization of the presence and purpose of God, and in the sense, too, of self-conscious surrender to Him,—would come for the most part so quietly that on-lookers might be unaware of the first approaches of the kingdom in the normal childhood experience.

You may raise the question as to any practical value to be gained from the emphasis upon such a truth as this. Well, on Christmas Day it is surely permissible to dwell long and lovingly upon the thought of God's relation to the child. And anything is of value that helps us understand the workings of God. Anything is of value that shows something of the all-embracingness of an activity of which we are unconscious. If anything can prompt to worshipful feelings, surely this recognition of the silent coming of the Spirit of God Himself upon generation after generation ought to make us bow down with reverent admiration.

The real miracles in this world are these soul-miracles. The kingdom of God is somewhat in its coming like the kingdom of self-consciousness. When does the child really become conscious of itself? It would take a sharp eye indeed to answer this question. Yet year after year the kingdom of self-consciousness dawns on unfolding minds. When

does the kingdom of patriotism come to a child? It would take a sharp eye to answer this question. The kingdom of patriotism comes without observation. Except in rare instances it would be hard for an outsider to form the slightest conception of the growth of a child's patriotism. But the kingdom comes whether we observe its coming or not. Generation after generation of young patriots arise, each of whom would, if necessity came, die for his country. So with the unobserved coming of the kingdom of God. The influences of God's Spirit play around the unfolding soul in ways that we can not even suspect. If then there are moments when the outlook seems dark because there is no startling or marvelous manifestation of the presence of God in the world, let us steady ourselves by the thought of the silent approach of this kingdom whose marchings we can not hear.

A still further instance of the way that the kingdom comes without our being con-

scious of its approach is to be found in the changes that take place in the motives of men as the men pass out of the kingdom of this world into the kingdom of the truth. The kingdom of God means that the man who has been living for himself must change his motive. He must cease to live for himself and begin to live for others. The realm of motive, however, is a hidden realm. The motive may change without our knowledge of the change. The outward deed may be the same. The change is world-wide from the old life to the new, but there may be nothing but the man's own statement to tell us of the change.

Sometimes the most worthy Christians fall into lack of charity because of misunderstanding at this point. A man stands up in a religious service and professes that he has passed from death unto life. Surely such a passage must be accompanied by some remarkable outward transformation of life. But in our day it may be that there is little

room for transformations in some lives. The recruits for the kingdom are changed in motive. They are doing all things with a different aim, but there is no call for them to change the manner of work or of living. Here is a man teaching school, or conducting a business, or carrying on a professional work. He will teach or plan or perform operations in the same way after the transformation as before. But there has been a transformation, nevertheless, and the transformation is the all-essential event in his life.

I wonder if there would not be some disappointment if the kingdom of God should come this Christmas afternoon. To-morrow's work would have to go on in many lives just about as it has always done. There would be many, many, who would be compelled to make radical change, but there are many others to whom a change would be essentially a change that would be without observation. The inner motive would be transformed, but the outer life would be the same,

except, of course, in the religious exercises, and this might lead to confusion except to those who have seen something of the force of the Master's word.

Still again in our thought of the advance of the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ we have to bear in mind always the fact that there is some growth in grace, even with mature saints, that can in the nature of the case make but little outward sign. Let us take the case of the saint who year after year is growing in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. There may be no way for his increasing goodness to make any noticeable transformation in the outward world around him. Suppose for example that during the past year you have won a notable victory in the depth of your own life. It may be a victory over a fault whose existence no one but yourself suspected. Some temptation peculiarly your own was wont to assail you. You did not feel called upon to confess the fault to any one but God, and

there is no reason why you should tell us just what the fault was, now that it is overcome. The victory has nevertheless been profoundly significant from your own standpoint. The world is better because you have won the victory, yet there is and can be no outward sign of the victory that makes loud report in the world of things. Or you have attained a keener spiritual insight since last Christmas. This has been more meaningful for your life than has any other experience you have known. But there may be no remarkable way of making this insight count in your dealing with the workaday world. The world is impressed by the coarser and more noticeable transformations. The transformation of the drunkard across the way may not be nearly so great a work of grace as the illumination of your mind to the finer and fuller truths of God. Yet in an estimate of the world's progress the transformation of the drunkard would be taken into the account and your own development would al-

most necessarily escape attention. In the real thought of the world's improvement, however, both the drunkard's victory over a base appetite and your own admission to the deeper understanding must be taken into the review. Is the world getting better? Is the kingdom really coming? We must think it is. In invisible ways men and women are growing toward the light.

Again, think of the changes that go on in our beliefs without our being conscious of them. We take the formal statement of the creed and put into it a newer and newer meaning as the years go by. We look back after the lapse of time to problems that once troubled us and are astonished beyond measure to see how well we understand them. The situation is somewhat parallel to the situation of our general intellectual life. You remember how exceedingly hard some of the statements in the school text-books seemed to you during the days of your experience as a pupil. You always left the

book with a feeling that you did not understand, and when you passed out of that book to another you did so with a mind perhaps not half-satisfied. To-day you come across that old school book. As you turn its pages to find the difficult passage which was once such a trial to you you can not discover it. Everything seems now perfectly plain. Whence has come the better understanding? It has come from the gradual changes that have been making you stronger in mind during the years. Just when the particular crisis came that made you perfectly able to see the meaning of the text-book there is absolutely no telling.

Some illustrations are used till they are threadbare, to show how silently and gradually the kingdom of evil comes upon the human heart. For example, there is the old, old illustration of the Canada thistle, a pest of the farmer's fields that comes without observation. The seed may be carried in the feathers of the passing birds, or it may even

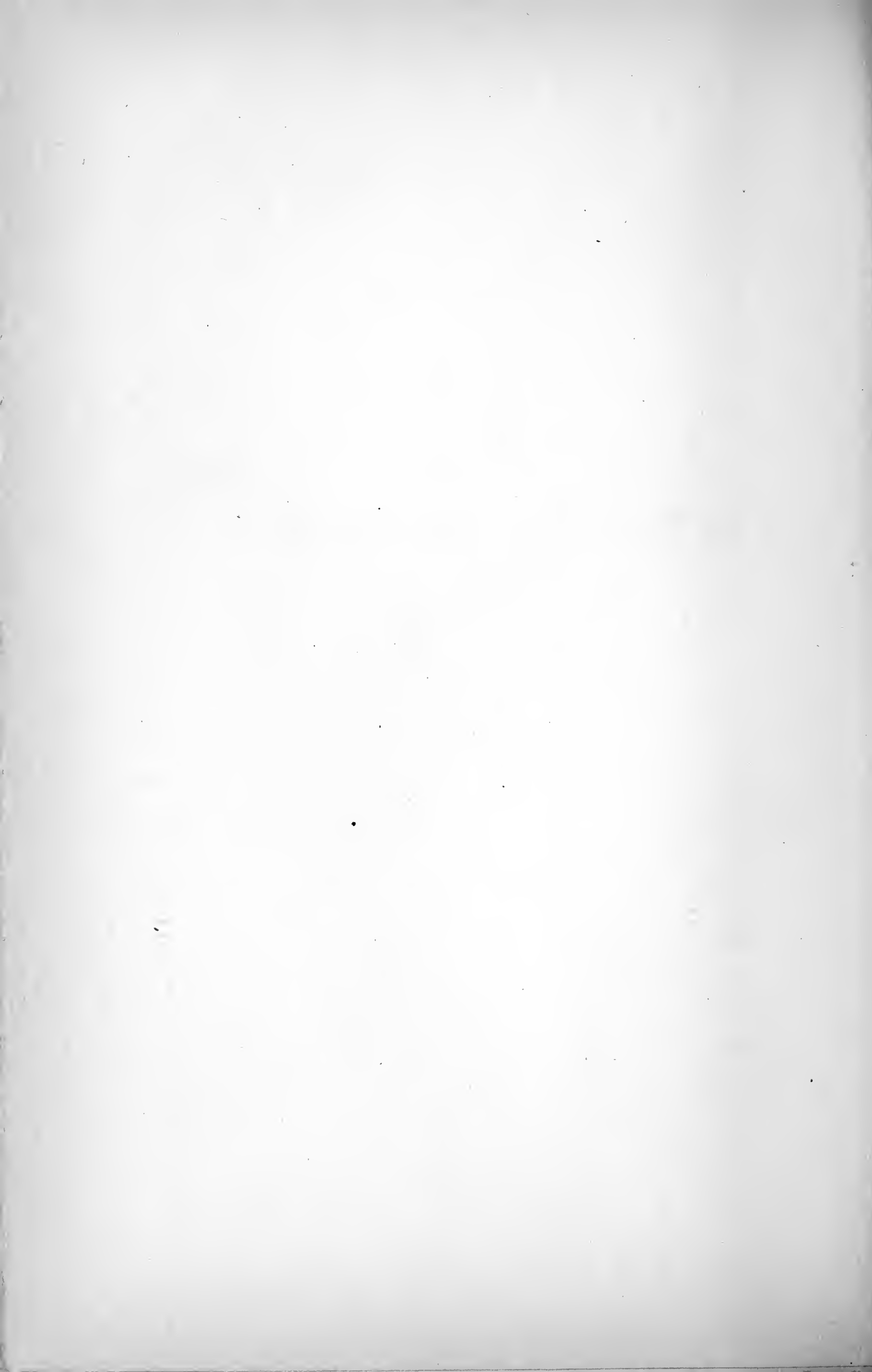
float in the air without the slightest possibility of being detected. All that the farmer knows is that some springtime the signs of the hated weed are manifest. The illustration is often used to show how the seeds of evil may be sown in our minds without our suspecting their presence. Evil does thus come into our minds, but let us not be one-sided in our thoughts of unobserved comings. In the realm of the Spirit God's roses and lilies and violets send their seeds into our lives without our detecting anything more than a passing breeze. The seed falls and springs toward a harvest.

So, too, in the kingdom of deepening love toward God and more complete dependence upon Him. We wonder sometimes if the kingdom of God's love really means much to us. Some have abundant reason for asking that question, but they are not always the ones most likely to ask it. It is more often asked by a good man who is looking for some very noticeable sign of the kingdom's pres-

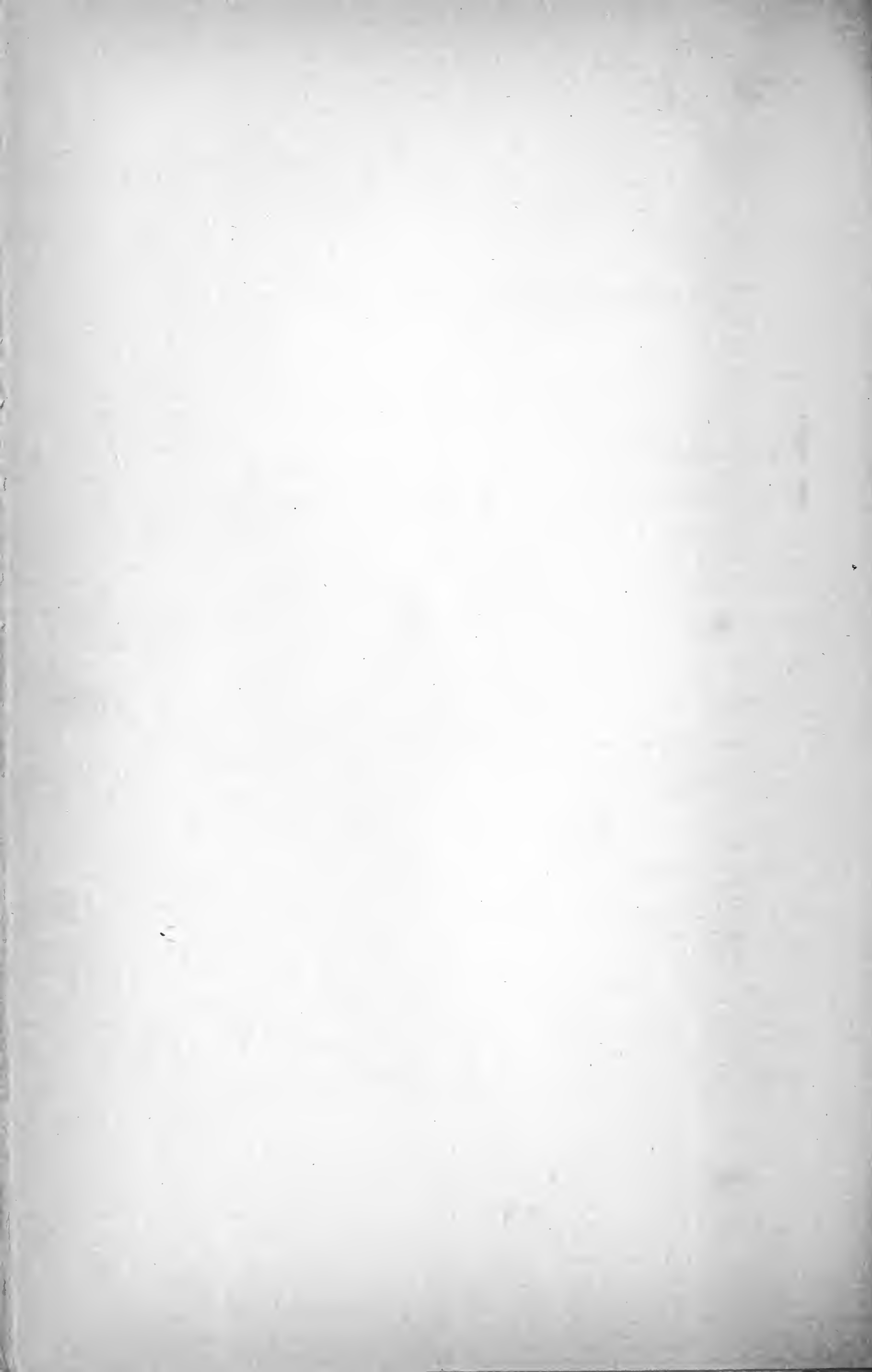
ence. Suppose we approach this matter from the side of an analogy often used to show the possibility of falling away slowly from God. We are told so frequently of two friends who little by little drift apart. They do not suspect the increasing separation, and are amazed to find at some crisis that they are leagues apart,—with no hope of re-union. So it is possible for the soul to drift from God. But the other side of the analogy is equally true. Some friends grow closer together without suspecting the fact. Then when crisis comes they are astonished beyond measure to see how vital the union has grown to be. So the love of God and increasing dependence upon Him become more and more real to many hearts.

The situation is similar in relation to the thought of increasing power to serve God. The boy tries some feat of strength and finds his strength insufficient. Later he does what he has previously failed to do. The strength has come without observation. We are told

of those whose strength oozes away so imperceptibly that they do not suspect until they bestir themselves and find the power gone. We ought to hear more of those whose strength increases so imperceptibly that they can only say in the day of trial that the kingdom of God has come upon them without observation. And it is thus with all those changes that take place in the depths below our field of vision,—changes that we could not see if we would. We sometimes tremble at the thought of the unknown possibilities of evil in ourselves. Up from depths that we can not fathom there sometimes leap impulses that can come only from evil. We tremble at the thought of what may be “down cellar” in our lives. The hidden depths, however, can be ruled by God, and even here He can preside over all the influences that work upon us so silently. He can work in these depths for the bringing in of the kingdom.



**THE KINGDOM LIKE UNTO A
PEARL**



THE KINGDOM LIKE UNTO A PEARL

Matt. xiii, 45, 46.

WE need not attempt an exposition of the main thought of the Master as He uttered the words of the text. All I care for on this Christmas morning,—this day of beautiful gifts, and, we trust, of beautiful impulses,—is the fact that the Master used the word “pearl.”

We get a valuable little glimpse into the mind of Jesus by the very fact that He said “pearl.” It shows that He saw the beautiful things of this earth. He did not pass the jewels by as the Puritan would have done. He saw them and no doubt took notice of their surpassing beauty. The casual words of Jesus show a wide range of interest. This wide interest included the things which are

of value simply and solely for their beauty. Jesus did not treat His eyes after the manner of an ascetic. He apparently let His thought dwell lovingly upon the good things of this earth—reveling in the fascination of their beauty. If He could see the beauty of the lily it is certain that He saw also the beauty of the pearl. We feel a deepened human interest in the Master if we think of Him arrested by the brilliancy of a jewel and finding satisfaction in the gaze upon the gem.

But there is still further significance in the use of the word. Not only does it show us the interest of the Master in the things of this earth, but it gives us a thought of use in framing our conceptions of the kingdom of God. Of course, the main aim in this speech to the disciples is the emphasis upon the absolute superiority of the kingdom to anything else whatsoever, but the use of the word “pearl” itself is as suggestive as the direct statement of Jesus.

The word must have suggested to the plain minds of these disciples that the kingdom of God is to be regarded not only as a necessity, and not *only as a source of support and of comfort, but also as a luxury.*

An excellent man published an excellent book some years ago entitled "The Cure of Souls." The book is well worth any one's reading, but the title suggests a view of the gospel held by multitudes,—the view that the gospel is chiefly remedy. Souls are taken sick and when everything else fails they turn to the gospel. The gospel is a sort of last resort in extreme spiritual distress. On that ground it is tolerated by many who can find no use for it in the ordinary conditions of normal life.

We all recognize, however, the shortcomings of this view. We do not think that we come very close to an understanding of the Gospel truth when we speak of the Scriptures merely as a book of remedies. We pass at once to a larger conception and

speak of the gospel as a comfort and daily food. We find in the gospel more than the satisfaction of pressing need at the time of extremity. We speak of Christ as the Bread of Life. He is the atmosphere which we breathe. He is useful to us at all times.

Now this is an immeasurable advance upon the earlier conception, and for the average experience it probably states the final truth. The ordinary Christian has done well if he has come to the place where he finds in the gospel the satisfaction of daily needs. This is no doubt the thought upon which Christ Himself would have us place the most stress. But there is a further conception, and that further conception is implied in this allusion to the pearl. The gospel is not only medicine and bread and water and air,—it is also luxury. The higher reach of Christian experience comes when the disciple begins to find in the gospel the satisfaction of the craving for spiritual

luxury. The ordinary mind may not know what is meant by spiritual luxury, but the mind to which Christ really addressed this word about the pearl will understand.

Let us say, then, that Christ teaches a lesson here for a certain kind of practical men. He wishes to correct a thought of usefulness. Some men approach the kingdom with a conception of practicalism which really does much to hide the true reality of the kingdom. Against this thought the Christ puts His word about the kingdom as a goodly pearl. Of what use is a pearl? Ask a certain type of man which is the more valuable in his eyes,—the pearl or the oyster in which it has been found, and he will respond that his personal liking runs wholly to the oyster. We know, though, when we stop to think, that the craving for pearls is more worthy than the craving for oysters, useful as the oysters undoubtedly are. No,—we have not the highest thought of the kingdom of God until we come to see it as su-

premely beautiful, as well as supremely useful.

Suppose we should carry out to the extreme that idea of usefulness which we seem at times to hold. A great many arguments could be found for our course. We might do away with a great deal of the expense of clothes, for example, for do we not all know that the expense of clothes is incurred largely in the effort to make them look well? We might have a sort of practical Utopia, so far as clothes were concerned. We should insist first of all that the cloth should be of a most durable kind. We should next insist that the cloth should be cut solely with regard to serviceableness. All peculiarities of taste would of necessity be done away with. We could see very clearly that under such a scheme the expense of clothes could be reduced to a minimum. We might go farther and carry our reforms into all departments of life. Wall paper, patterns in rugs, flower gardens,—except those producing useful

herbs—could all be done away with, while pictures and other works of pure art could be dispensed with at once.

Of course, the moment we begin to look at the matter in this way we see a usefulness in beauty that we did not before suspect. Let us remember that the same results would follow all attempts to take beauty out of religion. And since beauty does play such a part in our religious enjoyment it may be well for us to stop occasionally to see how worthy a factor it is. The kingdom should be sought not only for its usefulness in the lower sense, but for its surpassing beauty as well. A beautiful church edifice, built with the thought of the worship of God in mind, is by its very beauty a preacher of the glories of the kingdom. We know that God can be worshiped anywhere, but it seems the fitting thing to make His dwelling-place the most beautiful creation in the city. Some looking upon a beautiful temple might say, “Why was not this money rather given to

the poor?" They might deplore the erection of costly edifices whose usefulness for commoner purposes is not so great as their intrinsic beauty. Of course another building, capable of holding all the people that ever came to the fine structure, might be more cheaply built, but such critics need to remember that while needless extravagance is always to be deplored, the poor need some other goods quite as much as they need bread. They need to see the thought of beauty as well as the thought of usefulness connected with the idea of the kingdom of God. They need to feast on the beauties of the kingdom quite as much as on the material bread that does not always come from heaven or lead to heaven.

Moreover, the man who has this thought of the kingdom of God as supplying him with the truest luxuries of earth can get satisfaction out of the thought of the beauty of the Christ life. The life of the Master is surpassingly useful. This we all understand.

The life is the bread and the air upon which we live, but it is more than that. It can be looked upon, and that rightfully, too, as the great luxury beside which all others sink into insignificance. The life is symmetrical. It is like a perfect jewel. We speak of it as the flawless life. The suggestion is that of a gem, perfect of its kind. We know something of the beauty of Christ's words. We see beauty in the very texture of the Christ-thought itself, and find in the teaching of Jesus a symmetry of form and a fineness of expression that lift His words up at once to the high plane of spiritual luxuries. If we see His sacrifice,—not merely from the standpoint of its usefulness,—but from the standpoint of sheer beauty, we shall begin to appreciate more fully the greatness of the gift of God in Christ Jesus.

With our text in mind we should think of the Christly deeds done around us, not only from the point of view of men seeking for practical and beneficial forces, but from the

point of view of men seeking for spiritual jewels. There are many whose lives are not remarkably useful in this world, but who nevertheless are a perpetual delight to the God of all beauty. Their deeds affect no great transformation. They do not weigh as much, so far as actual result is concerned, as the order of the foreman of a band of street laborers, but they are full of the fineness that comes from God. In such God takes great delight. We are told that many a gem of purest ray serene lies unseen at the bottom of the deep, but the most essential fact about this line is that it is not true,—God sees and rejoices in the jewel deed, the jewel word. The occasion may have been something entirely trifling and insignificant, and the result may have passed unnoticed. But the deed itself may have been surpassingly fine. A bit of kindly tact in conversation, that passed unnoticed by every hearer, a little touch of kindliness absolutely insignificant when measured by the more useful

things that we are all expected to do, a restraint put upon the lips lest the utterance might injure a sensitive spirit,—things of this kind are the spiritual jewels to be seen around us if we have eyes to see. In these God delights.

Again, we are often likely to put emphasis on big-heartedness. The hail and hearty, even boisterous greeting! how we enjoy it! We all indeed stand in need of being bigger-hearted. Let there not be the slightest misunderstanding here, but it must be remembered that big-heartedness is not necessarily great-heartedness. The big-hearted man, after all, is quite likely to lack real fineness of feeling. His feeling may be rough-and-ready and lack the fineness of an inward and deeply spiritual quality. The big-hearted man seems to understand all classes of people, but a little investigation may show that he does not really come as close to them in helpfulness as we had imagined. The man is a rare man who can sym-

pathize with all people and yet have any very valuable message for this or that particular person. This rare man is the ideal, to be sure, but he is not often found in real life. It may happen that the man who has not been of the sort that the world calls big-hearted is, nevertheless, fine-hearted. He may have a delicacy of sympathy that big-heartedness knows not of. The fine hearts are quite as likely to be of service in the world as their more demonstrative brethren, and from the standpoint of beauty their lives may have a quality which is the delight of angels. Such men may not be able to take many persons within the range of their sympathy, but those whom they can take may find in the sympathy the one luxury of their lives. So, too, in the sphere of Christian doing. The vast number of good deeds is not the only consideration. The quality is to be considered.

The word pearl gives us a further suggestion. We all think and say a great deal

about the nearness of God. It is one of the glories of the gospel of our day that it gives us an accessible God. The kingdom is all around us and no one of us need be at any time far from it. This is gloriously true, but qualification is necessary. The kingdom is around us in the same sense that the air is around us. It is within reach of all, and all may come easily into its possession. But, after all, the kingdom is not only medicine and bread and air, but pearl as well. The pearls are not so accessible. So that there is a sense in which the kingdom should be the object of perpetual search. We are like unto merchantmen seeking goodly pearls. The pearls are for all, but many do not seem to know of their existence, or if they know they do not have the interest that would take them on a voyage of pearl discovery.

Literature is to-day the property of all who care to learn to read. Great hosts avail themselves of the privilege of reading. The treasures that could really be called luxuries

are appreciated by the few. Many are called to the enjoyment of these intellectual luxuries, but few are chosen. The deeper suggestiveness, the subtle beauty, the fineness of the texture—this does not appear at first glance. So with the other spiritual luxuries. Take friendship. The blessing of friendship is open to all, but how many appreciate the real luxuries of friendship? These do not appear in an afternoon's acquaintance. They come with the long journeys through the years. In one sense the kingdom is near us,—even at the doors. In another sense it is a long distance from us. Of course the sea is the sea, and once on the sea we may travel to any part of it, but we may be a long distance from the pearl fisheries. The jewels are found in the out-of-the-way places, but if we will we may have them. There are South Africas and Australias and Indias in religious experience. The travelers thither can find pearls and diamonds.

THE RECOVERY OF THE LOST

THE RECOVERY OF THE LOST

Luke xv.

IN a classic passage Charles Dickens has dwelt upon Christmas as the season of reunion, of return of wanderers, of longing for the lost who may be restored. It is indeed Christian to spend Christmas in thinking of Jesus as the Seeker for the lost.

In the fifteenth chapter of St. Luke's Gospel there are stories of three merry-makings. All deal with the restoration of the lost,—the shepherd's joy over finding a lost sheep, the woman's joy over the recovery of the lost coin, the banquet which a father gave over the return of a son.

Jesus was called Jesus because He was to save from sin. He came to seek and to save the lost. We can keep close to the spirit of Christmas and understand something, though

of course not all, of the Master's work as Savior by looking at the different meanings of the word "lost" suggested in Luke's pictures of rejoicing. It may be that we shall discover that the lost are not after all merely those who roam the streets on Christmas eve, vagabond and destitute. It may be that some of the most completely lost persons sit at Christmas feasts, and possibly some of these think of themselves as rightfully wearing the name of Christ. It may be well for all of us to celebrate the day of Christ by guarding against certain spiritual tendencies which make for inner lostness, and by devoting ourselves anew to seeking and saving the lost whom we do not often think of as lost. We turn to Luke's stories.

First of all the Master tells of the merry-making over the finding of the Lost Sheep. The sheep had not come to destruction when the shepherd found it. The wolves had not yet torn it or the cold winds killed it. The sheep was lost simply because it was wander-

ing in the wilderness without a leader. We are not forcing the meaning of the parable when we say that the Master has in His mind here the vast class of persons who are moving through life, or rather around about in life, with no sense of direction. Such persons live wandering, drifting lives. Many such who gather around Christmas tables are as truly lost as the vagrants in the streets.

The first type of the lost condition, then, can be characterized as that which lacks sense of direction. In spiritual things some do not know which direction is East. Some do not know even their right hand from their left. If we wish to come to an understanding of this spiritual condition along the line of illustration we may say that we can detect a kind of intellectual lostness even in the conversation of some men. We do not refer to imbeciles or lunatics, but to the men whose conversation has no sense of direction. Even in their most serious moments they begin with the conventional reference to the

weather, thence jump to politics, the Civil War, crop prospects, and wireless telegraphy—all within two minutes. The mind is working wholly by what the students call the law of association. The problem in dealing with such a mind is to bring it to the place where it can work according to the law of reason. And that is a large part of the problem of education,—to save minds by giving them a sense of direction. The great dramatist has told us of the plain, blunt man who only speaks straight on. This sentence was a part of Mark Antony's craftiness, for the plain blunt man never does speak straight on,—the plain blunt man, that is, who has never been trained. The plain blunt man goes around in circles. As it is in the training of the plain blunt man, so it is in the training of the scientist or the philosopher. The scientist can be lost in the mass of unassociated facts. His salvation is in a formula which gives him a sense of direction. The philosopher becomes a philosopher only

when he is oriented in the field of philosophy. Nothing is more deplorable intellectually than the condition of a student who has mass upon mass of facts and theories without a sense of direction as to the way through them or out of them. Educational salvation, I repeat, comes with the sense of direction.

Applying now our thought to moral and spiritual problems we have to say that men are lost morally not merely when they are abandoned reprobates or hardened unbelievers, but when in the realm of moral and spiritual life they have lost their sense of direction. For example, in the field of moral practice a man may have abandoned the moral ideals of his youth because of their fancied narrowness without being able to get hold of anything broader. Or he may become confused by trying to find the deciding element in moral worth in the outward deed alone and not in the inner spirit, so that when he finds good men doing deeds which he has not up to that time approved

of he is at a loss. Or he may have been discouraged at the lack of material result which has followed his devotion to right, and has concluded that the wicked's flourishing like the green bay-tree is proof enough that the wicked are in closer harmony with the life-giving centers. For any one of these reasons, or for a hundred others like them, a man may lose his sense of moral direction. He may not become a whit less respectable in the eyes of his neighbors than before, but he is lost like a sheep in the wilderness. The wolves of temptation may not have devoured him or the winds of hard circumstance overcome him,—but he is in peril through not knowing the way.

So also it is in the religious realm. A man does not have to be a blasphemous railer to be lost in the sense in which the Master uses the term. He may have been devout enough to start with, but the making of the many religious books of which there is no end, the discovery that many high truths

have very lowly antecedents, the increasing emphasis on the materialistic side of things by science, or more especially by the great commercial forces, some glimpse into the scattered excellences of systems of thought outside of Christianity,—things like these, and there are many such things, may confuse the mind. There is a way through all these difficulties, but some thoughtful minds do not find it, and are lost in that they do not know the points of the compass. They begin by putting a great many other systems of thought and of practice on the same plane as the Christian system. They think that they thus are to live in the elevated atmosphere of a high plateau, and end by finding themselves in a deep and smothering valley with no way out which they can see. Putting any and every other aspect of life on the same plane of importance as the religious is apt to end in utter bewilderment as to relative values.

Christ comes to seek and to save the lost.

He comes to bring into life a sense of direction as to religious and moral truth. He does this not by setting before men cold and barren abstract principles. We know that even in the realm of the most abstract intellectual themes the teacher who succeeds best is the teacher who knows how to shepherd the minds who look to him for instruction. The great work begun by the founders of schools of thought has been carried on to further conquests by those who stood in close personal relation to the founder. There has come into the mind of the disciple not only an intellectual grasp on the truth taught by the leader, but a personal enthusiasm for the leader himself. It is a great mistake to imagine that movements in philosophy, for example, have gone on by the unfolding of an inner dialectic of reason as their driving force. In no realm is the influence of vital affectional contact more to be taken into account than in the growth of great thought movements. Now if Christ had done noth-

ing more than to give men a sense of direction by a formal statement of His truth He would have done much. His leading, however, is like the leading of any great prophet,—it is a personal and pastoral leading. He leads men by winning their love, by being patient with their misunderstandings, by bearing with their infirmities until by communicating His spirit to them He brings them out of the wilderness. They cease to wander. He does not add greatly to the store of religious facts, but He shows the way. He begets the sense of spiritual direction.

The next parable is the story of joy on the discovery of the lost coin. In what sense was the coin lost? Not in the sense that any damage had been as yet done to the coin itself. It was a good coin when found. It was made of the right kind of metal and had the right image and superscription. The coin was lost simply in that it was out of right relations. It had been swept out with

the dust or had rolled off into the corner or down through the crack. If we may carry out the suggestiveness of the word itself, the coin was lost because it was out of circulation.

The Master's figures of speech are all thought-provoking, and none more so than this likening of a life to a coin. We do not do violence to the spirit of the parable when we allow our minds to linger for a moment with the suggestiveness of the word "coin." We get a new glimpse of the part which a human life is to play in the world when we think of the work done by a coin,—loosening the industrial and social forces, leaving behind it blessing or curse. The man who puts himself in right working relationships to the powers that make for righteousness may be looked upon as part of God's own gold buying for the kingdom of Heaven and for God Himself delights which can come in no other way. And the parable of the lost coin suggests to us the thought of those good lives

which by the forces of circumstances perhaps have somehow been dropped out of the world's actual working life or have been swept to one side by the force of overpowering conditions. Good gold, but out of circulation. Many such gather around Christmas tables. And then there are the persons who take themselves out of circulation. The sad part of it is that very often these persons are among the best in the world, so far as their own life is concerned. Only for one reason or another they have gotten out of touch with the working forces of the kingdom of service. Such persons are apt to be persons of a very fine type of sensitiveness, and this very sensitiveness itself may work harm. For example, a young man is just coming forth to the work of the world from his studies. He has been a faithful student. He has mastered thoroughly the principles with which he expects to mark the world for good. With the first contact with the world, however, there is a dash of cruel disappoint-

ment. The world does not care to be marked. Moreover, there are certain tough intractabilities with which the student finds his theory unable to cope. He is discouraged at the prospect of remaining a dreamy doctrinaire on the one hand, or of descending to the cheaply practical on the other. In the dilemma he gets out of circulation altogether. He is lost through what might be called a kind of academic sensitiveness. Then there is the man lost through æsthetic sensitiveness. He has the same kind of shrinking from the rough and soiled life of the world that a crisp and shining coin might have from the grimy hands into which it is to pass on its way from the mint at the beginning to the melting pot at the end. Then there are the discouraged persons who are appalled at the greatness of the work to be done and at the smallness of their own ability. They forget the vast results which follow if the smallest coin simply keeps itself in constant circulation.

To save all such persons to the life of the world the Master comes. He helps men to see the point of connection between the largest thought and the least task. He speaks new dignity into the hardest drudgery and new might into the least lives. His final picture of the awards at the end of the world, majestic as it is with the glory of the spectacle of the nations assembled before Him, takes its point from the kind of service which is most highly honored. Not the great statesmen, not the mighty leaders in thought, not the great preachers, but the men who have done such little deeds of kindness that they themselves have forgotten them because of their very insignificance—these are the ones who are to receive the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world. And it is well that it should be so, for those who can reveal the love of Christ through the cup of water and the loaf of bread and the visit in time of sickness are those who make the effective revelation.

They are the ones who have made themselves and the gospel profoundly intelligible. As we come into conversation with some who have mightily influenced the world for good it may be that we are struck by the commonplace in their thought. We wonder at the secret of their strength until we reflect that it may be the very commonplace itself. Their secret is in extraordinary persistence in using the ordinary. "The nimble sixpence does more work than the slow shilling." And their ordinariness is not ordinariness,—they have seen the extraordinariness of the ordinary under the light of the Christ vision. They have caught the spirit of Him who when He was thinking the profoundest thoughts concerning Himself, namely, that He came from God and that He went to God, took a towel and began to wash the disciples' feet. They have seen at least this much of the secret of Christ's redemption, that our lives are good gold, but none too good to buy this world and all its power for the kingdom of God.

This is what our lives are given us for, to be used in connection with the present service of the kingdom of God, to be geared in somehow to the forces of this world to make them Christian, to be spent in buying spiritual treasures for the kingdom of God. If we will not do this we miss the one end for which we have been begotten. There is a melting pot for gold that has been withdrawn from circulation, but there is no melting pot for souls which are out of circulation. That is to say, there is no making a life over into anything else. The life that withdraws its treasures from actual work in the service of this present life sins in a profounder sense than the money miser who hoards gold and freezes out the industrial and commercial life. There is a sin worse in its consequences for society than the sin of loss of actual gold. It is the sin of spiritual demonetization by which a man, good in himself, lets his life lose its purchasing power by withdrawing himself from actual

contact with the working forces of righteousness.

The Master goes on to the parable of the son who was lost in the far country. The essential truth about this son's condition is all told when it is said of him that after he had been reduced to the companionship of swineherds he came to himself. The son was lost because he had not come to himself. Many of us may incline to think that the sin of the son consisted essentially in the riotous living, but the riotous living is an incident, or rather a consequence following from the son's view of himself and of his father. The son really had no expressed view of himself. He had not thought anything out, but the view on which he acted was that his relation to his father was simply one of advantage in that he could get hold of the good things. He counted his father simply among the good things which had happened to him, and he proposed to enjoy the material possessions to the utmost.

There was no thought of sonship on the boy's part, no thought of seriousness or responsibility of any kind. The son's life moved simply on the animal plane of the enjoyment of material goods. The son never had arisen to an understanding of what sonship and fatherhood mean. He had not come to himself. He was lost because he had not come to himself. No power had as yet come into his life to awaken him.

The parable is the classic expression of the goodness of God to those who in paths of sin give themselves to riotous and rebellious lives. Even after such have spent all and have been reduced to nothing by famine and after they are of no worth to a country in time of grave crisis they are of worth to God. The parable can never lose its force for all such. Yet we must not miss the point in those words, "when he came to himself." The rioting was just the consequence and sign of an inner state, and that inner state may be the state of many whose inner spirit

does not find outward expression in the same way as did the younger son's. There are other kinds of animalism than the animalism of riotousness. There is the animalism of a kind of wolfish instinct of the chase, for example. If the younger son had taken his goods and gone into a far country and there increased his substance mightily by driving all business competitors to the wall, he would have been just as much beside himself, and quite as much lost in animalism as was the rioter. He might have been more lost, for such a course might have even more surely kept all kindly feeling to the good father from rising in his heart. The animalism which is just a survival of a kind of wild instinct of the chase is just as sure to keep a man from coming to himself, from seeing himself as the really human being which God intends him to be, as is the animalism of riotousness. No, the son's sin was not merely in wasting the money. He might never have come to himself even if he had

increased the money and made only such personal expenditures as the most staid in the community would have sanctioned. Or there is the animalism of sluggishness and sheer amiable complacency, the inability to see anything which calls for divine discontent, the willingness to look upon sorrow and sin without personal discomfort or without an impulse to help. The son might have invested his substance profitably and have lived on in comfort and yet have never come to himself. He might never have thought of his father's longing for him, he might not have had any feelings which would have made such longing intelligible if he had felt it. He might never have risen above the animal, or at least the sub-human plane, to an understanding of what his life was intended to be.

In one sense being lost consists in being lost to ourselves. In one sense coming to God is just coming to ourselves. When the son came to himself, when the slumbering humanity in him at last awoke and rebelled

against the food of the swine, he came at the same time to his father. When he came to himself he saw that his sin consisted not merely in spending the money,—it consisted in having not been worthy to be called a son. He had never really looked upon himself as a son. How far did the younger son really travel? The real journey which he took was the distance between his thought of his father when he left home and his thought when he started back. The real distance was the distance between the tone with which he said, “Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me” and the tone with which he said, “Father, I have sinned.”

Christ is the Savior of the lost son, in that He is the quickener of the life to an understanding of itself. Through Him the thoughts of many hearts are revealed. The revelation of the spirit of Christ, as we see it in the New Testament and as we see it caught and reflected in good lives, brings men to an understanding of themselves. It may

require all the sharp teaching of failure to bring men to the place where they are willing to look upon Christ, but when they really look upon Him and see the goodness of God in Him they are on the path to themselves and the road back to the Father's house. The world needs to-day as ever the thought of God as we see Him in Christ Jesus. There are many who believe in God who look upon Him simply as the great purveyor and care for nothing more. They think that if God will really divide with men His living all will be well, and some even erect this thought into an all-sufficient creed with the pronouncement that if we can just find a way to get hold of more of the good things of the Almighty's material possessions, we shall have all the redemption which the world needs. The picture of the younger son wasting his substance is the *reductio ad absurdum* of this argument. Men will never find themselves on a creed like this. They must come to the higher thought of the goodness of God as

seen in Christ and turn to Him before they can be themselves. The world does not need angelic lives, but it does need human lives. The path to real humanness is at the same time the path to real divineness.

We come at last to the part of the parable which deals with the elder son, and he is the last type of the lost condition of whom we wish to speak. Some may not think of him as lost at all. They may think of him as the faithful helper of his father, remaining at home during the wild career of the younger son. The sympathy of some may go out to the elder son as really somewhat abused by the extravagant welcome of the returning prodigal. The picture of the Master is too well drawn, however, for us to mistake its meaning. Christ is here dealing with a perennial type of spiritually lost life, the life lost because of a certain petty littleness and smallness. Every detail in the picture adds to the clearness with which we discern the spiritual littleness of the type which the

Master is striving to set forth. The elder son may never have strayed a mile from his father's house, but he stands out before us as an instance of the completeness with which a man can get himself lost at home.

The elder son has a little thought of his relation to his father. He regards himself merely as the servant of his father. "Lo, these many years do I serve thee." He stands for that small type of Christian life which never rises higher than the thought of being a servant of God. The idea of real sonship never comes within the horizon of this small view. With the elder son it seems to have been a matter of paying his way by service and not of entering into sympathetic companionship with his father. The father had yearned for companionship, but the son had given him service of the hireling type. Of course the true son of God is to serve God, but the service is to be of the kind which is loaded with kindly spirit toward the Father, and which is to act simply as the

means for showing such spirit. The service looked at in and of itself is altogether insignificant. God has not put us on the earth for the sake of getting certain work done. He can find better servants than we are for the performance of the work itself. The child sends to the absent parent a letter. The father cherishes the letter because the letter shows the will of the child to come into interested and affectionate communion with the parent. The letter has no great value from the standpoint of penmanship. If the problem is simply to get a penman, the father can do better than to rely upon the six-year-old child. So with all our works. They are scrawling messages of good-will to God and have their sole value as such. The greatest works which men can do are of doubtful value merely as works. If it were a mere matter of getting the work done, the Almighty could transform this material universe without our help a great deal better than with our help. He could have in the beginning

made, with a few earthquakes, a far better water-way across the Isthmus of Panama, for example, than we can make in a hundred years. But the glory of God's Fatherhood is that it is a serious Fatherhood and has left some things undone for us to finish, not that we can do the work better, but that through the doing of the work we can come to an understanding of the Father better. After we have done all we are unprofitable servants, but we remember that we are not servants at all, but sons. The Almighty Father values the work for the spirit which it reveals. The thought of the relation of the soul to God as the relation of a servant to a master is a hard and barren one. The large view comes with the thought that God in His kindness puts a value into our work which there is really nothing in the work itself to warrant. This means that if we are striving to come up into companionship with Him He graciously takes the will for the deed, and puts upon the scrawling work a value alto-

gether out of proportion to anything in the work itself. The elder son was a little man—he looked upon his father as a master and himself as a hireling.

✓ This aspect of littleness is set before us, we repeat, in every detail of the parable. The son has a small view of his work. It is a mechanical work. It is a keeping of commandments rather than a living in the spirit. “I never transgressed a commandment of Thine,” the “never” creed and the “commandment” creed. In the spiritual world of relationship to God two negatives, or any number of them for that matter, can hardly be brought to make an affirmative. In the spiritual world vital and enkindling communion is hardly possible till the plane of mere commandment has been far transcended. Equally small is the son’s thought of reward. “Thou never gavest me a kid that I might make merry with my friends.” The thought of reward in the very companionship of the father has not dawned. It

is hard to avoid the suspicion of humor in the touch which makes the elder son talk about making merry with his friends, for the portrait which is drawn of him would make us think him a loveless, mechanical sort of person who could value neither a friend nor a present. Men whose work is all service after the manner of the hireling are not especially likely to have friends with whom to make merry, and not especially likely to make merry with any one, and not especially likely to appreciate the gift of a kid except from its market possibilities.

If all this seems severe, we have to point out the final touch of smallness which is really most damaging of all—the heartlessness of this little man. The brother is not a brother, but “thy son.” The worst construction is put upon that son’s past, “He hath devoured thy living with harlots.” We have here the setting forth of that type of holiness which can show a fine fervor of wrath against sin, especially the sin of fleshly

indulgence, and at the same time no trace of warm human feeling of sympathy for sinners. The type of piety which hates sin is all right in its way, but its way is a short way. The noble type of piety thinks not so much of the sin as of the sinner, and strives to put him in the way of restoration. Some of the cruelest persons are the good persons who never have been enlarged to see the divineness of the human kindness which can so love men as to be willing to go to any length to help them out of their sin. The little view has such desperate fear of sin that it will not go near sinners for fear of being contaminated.

How does the father in the parable deal with the smallness of the elder son? By throwing around him a perfect flood of his own largeness of soul. He ignores the pettiness and the meanness in a large appeal, an appeal which moves far above the plane of the son, but which by its very height may tempt the son to a spiritual ascent. "Thou

art ever with me and all that I have is thine.” Then follows the exalted speech, “*It is meet* that we should make merry and be glad”—the splendid appeal to the fitness of things which sweeps everything before it. The real prodigal in this parable is the father. Over against the wastefulness of the prodigal who spent money in riotous living and the wastefulness of the little son who allowed all the greatness of the father to flow past him through the years he places his own lavish love, which reckons the money spent as nought and the years of mechanical service as nought if only both sons can be won for real sonship.

The life of Christ means the lavishness of God. The cross of Christ means the profusion of self-sacrifice. We have been speaking of different types of the lost condition, and perhaps we have seen something of the danger of the wandering life, and of the life which gets out of working relation to the forces which help on the cause of righteous-

ness, and of the life which has not yet come to itself, and of the life which has never risen above a low and small plane. The danger may be greater than anything hinted at in these pages, for it may be possible to wander so far that there is no thought of longer seeking the right direction, or to remain out of connection with working forces so long as to have lost all desire ever to come again into circulation, or to remain beneath the real human plane so long that a final stupor settles upon the life, or to become so petty in the range of interests that the spiritual nature dwindles to a kind of spiritual vanishing point. We do not pretend to have considered all the ways by which men become lost. We do feel, however, that so various and multitudinous is the revelation of God in Christ Jesus and so large is that love, that any life which is interested enough in the kingdom of God to raise a question about its own relation to that kingdom can find for itself ample provision in the full life

of Christ for its own particular needs. Above all, we feel that the very largeness of the heart of God as laid bare in Christ is sufficient guarantee that God so knows our proneness to wander and to get away from the working forces and to settle down beneath ourselves and to miss the large things, that He can deal with all these and all other failings if we but look to Him for help. The Son of man is come to seek and to save the lost. The Son of man reveals a God who knows every path out of His kingdom, and the way back from every far country.



THE CHRISTMAS FEAST

THE CHRISTMAS FEAST

“ . . . Our . . . bread.”—*Matt. vi, 11.*

WE look forward with joy to the approach of the Christmas dinner. We feel that there is a sort of appropriateness about the celebration of Christmas with a feast of good things. The birth of Christ means the sanction and sanctification of all legitimate human satisfactions; and Christmas day should not suggest asceticism. The gifts of the day, the table spread with dainties, are lawful and appropriate parts of the Christmas festivities. Christ Himself was a Guest at feasts. He accepted costly gifts which came out of the affection of His disciples.

Far be it from me to sound a jarring note as this happy feast day draws near. Let precious offerings be made to wife and husband and children and friends in the name

of that Christ who blesses and ennobles the delights of human companionship. Call the wanderers home and heap the table with the best the larder can furnish! Still, in all our Christmas feasting let us not forget the need of Christian feasting. The Spirit of Christ should reign at the table which rejoices in the good-cheer which celebrates the day of Christ.

This means, of course, that there should really be a spiritual aspect to the Christmas dinner. The physical and animal part of the menu should not be allowed to usurp the first place. We do not refer merely to such gross matters as over-indulgence. We refer, rather, to the emphasis on cost for cost's own sake. In a previous sermon we have rejoiced over a fineness of spirit like that of the woman who could break an alabaster box of ointment on the feet of Jesus. The extravagance there, however, was not material so much as spiritual. A great love was to be revealed, and the extravagant gift was

the only adequate revelation. There is, on the other hand, an extravagance for the sheer sake of extravagance itself. Christmas is used in an unchristly way when it is made the excuse for worldliness and earthliness of this kind. We are coming pretty clearly to see in these days that extravagant banquets which lay the emphasis upon the "so much per plate" are very questionable affairs. The cost may be due to the high skill of the chef, and the dish may be indeed a creation of art, but too high a price for anything to eat is an exaltation of an animal and not a human or Christly ideal.

The Christian's regard for the Christ-ideal will keep him from over-indulgence. His regard for men ought to exert the same restraining influence. Suppose men applaud an extravagant display. Their applause shows that their taste is being debauched and corrupted. Suppose they protest. The sad feature about the Christmas feast is not merely that some are poor and have not

the good things which weight the rich man's table. The sad fact is the bitterness which the sight of these things begets in the poor man's breast. Still, the protest of the poor man against his rich neighbor's extravagant self-indulgence is essentially just. We may say all we please about the difference between the rich man and the poor man consisting only in this: that the poor man is angry at lacking the opportunity to do what the rich man does—but such utterance is too easy and too cheap. To see money wasted by a rich man when the poor man's children get only the Christmas which they see in the store windows and which they dream about at night calls forth a feeling which is more than mere selfish jealousy. The contrast is too painful. A man not at all radical or revolutionary in temperament may look upon a Fifth Avenue parade during the fashionable season with considerable misgiving as to the social effect. The motor-cars, and the horses, and the gowns are all beautiful

enough in themselves, but only too often they are being enjoyed by some who have never done a really hard day's work in all their lives. Besides, Fifth Avenue is altogether too close to the East Side. It is contrasts like that between Fifth Avenue and the East Side which have made revolutions so catastrophic and bloody.

Understand, now, not a word of this is intended as looking toward socialism or anything else except the spirit of thoughtfulness with which the Christian should come to the Christmas dinner. He will come to his dinner with great joy, and his dear ones will adorn themselves with the gifts which he has bestowed upon them, but all this will be done in a spirit of Christian thoughtfulness. †

The thoughtful Christian will even do more than think of a high ideal of Christian restraint as he comes to his feast. He will reflect upon the truth that the wealth which is his, be the amount great or small, is not altogether his own creation. It is a matter

of commonplace in current thinking that our material good things are social products. Give us *our* daily bread, says the Lord's Prayer. It is well that we at least occasionally put the emphasis upon the word *our*. We work together for the making of the bread—and the workers include not merely farmers and machinists and bankers and millers and bakers and grocers and deliverymen, but really include also all those who live together in an industrial society. The very fact that people live together in communities creates wealth, and very often the fortunate owner of certain lands or other properties sees his wealth increase through the growth of the industrial community without any efforts of his own. A very dull and foolish, even stupid, person might by the accident of bequest get possession of a tract of land like that in lower Manhattan, where the exigencies of commercial life force vast sections of Broadway up into the air in the form of concrete and steel skyscrapers. Now,

in an imagined case it would be absurd to say that the dull owner of the land himself is a creator of the wealth of the land. The people are the creators. Understand, we are not talking Henry Georgeism or any such thing. We are not underestimating the social importance of real estate dealers, who sometimes skillfully and wisely direct the movement of demand for land values. We are simply pointing out the fact that it is possible for men to attain great wealth through the working of industrial forces with which they themselves may have had absolutely nothing to do. Of course, it is also true that a man may likewise lose wealth through no fault of his own—by the shifting of demand to some other quarter. This possibility, however, only makes clear the fact of the share of society in creating the wealth which finds its way into the pockets of individuals. If a man owns railroad stocks or bonds he must not think overmuch of the part which he has played in keeping up the confi-

dence of the public in his particular kind of property. He must reflect long and patiently upon the truth that the great factor likely to be overlooked is just the fact that out of people's living together in communities comes in part the value of the great industrial agencies.

So, then, our bread is a social product. I can have two loaves for the price of one simply because modern industrial society is organized to produce bread cheaply; and the organization is possible only through the fact that people live together and have confidence in one another. The true Christian ought to put more and more meaning into *our* bread as he joins in the prayer with his children on Christmas day. He will not forget his obligations to the great human world outside. There may be no particular specific thing that he can do—except this, perhaps, and this is very important: he can at least remember that the coming of Jesus into this world should mean a deepening sense of re-

sponsibility on the part of the disciples for their stewardship over this world's goods. A general obligation to society seems very vague when we try prescribing detailed rules to conduct, but the obligation is real, nevertheless. The material blessings of Christmas day furnish an occasion for reflection on the obligation.

“Our bread,” the Master said. There is still another and more serious reflection that should be in the mind of the Christian as he gives himself to the feast of Christmas. He should allow himself to be touched with that searching question which modern social study forces upon us—the question as to whether any part of the good things upon his table belongs to some one else. While some are asking if they really have all their share of material good things, it may be well for those who have enough of this world's possessions to give feasts to ask themselves if they do not have more than their share. Here is a man whose income is derived from

the rent of tenement houses. He could, if he would, so alter his houses as to make them more sanitary, but as they are they are breeding places for tuberculosis. It may never have occurred to the owner of the houses that he should be on guard against tuberculosis. He has not thought of the fact that when poverty comes out of periods of illness, which in turn come from poor sanitary conditions, there is a duty of elimination and prevention resting upon the shoulders of some one. The old way of looking upon poverty and disease as afflictions which always come as providential trials is pretty seriously discounted by alert Christian thinking to-day. We do not take stock in that kind of doctrine as we once did. Of course, the will of God is the active agency in sending afflictions upon us, but some afflictions will cease when we come to a better understanding of what God desires to give us. What God wills to give men and what God wishes to give men may not always be

one and the same. If there is ignorance and willfulness on the part of men, God must act differently from the course He would take if there were intelligent response to His plan. A mark of the presence of the Divine in modern life is a willingness on the part of so many to undertake the redemption of the earth from scourges like tuberculosis. The Christian ought to think upon these things, and order his tenement houses accordingly.

Or, here is the manager of a mill. He is regarded as a skillful manager, with unusual ability to get large labor returns from his men. An employee is at work with a fast-flying wheel. The wheel shatters into a thousand pieces and kills the worker. The widow and four or five children, through a representative, ask damages, since the head of the family met death in faithful work at his post in the factory. The employer declines to do anything, on the ground that the worker was running his wheel over speed.

He quotes the law of the State and the rule of the mill that the wheels shall not be driven faster than a certain rate. This all sounds very well, but any one who knows the inside understands that the men are expected to break the rule and break the law. They can not keep their positions unless they are willing to run the wheels over speed. Suppose such an employer, having passed through one or a dozen such experiences since last Christmas, sits down to his Christmas dinner to-day. If he is a Christian at all he must see that the bread upon the table is not his own bread, but the bread of the widows and the orphans. The jewels that deck the fingers or the throats of the employer's wife and children are hideously precious—they are bought with the sufferings of women and children.

Now, some will say that all this arises inevitably out of modern industrial conditions and that the general economic forces are to blame. When we fall to scrutinizing general

economic forces closely, however, we find that they are largely the activities of particular men. Of course, economic forces are in part the resultant of physical conditions, but the forces are in even larger part the activities of men. Particular landlords control the conditions under which tens or hundreds of persons live. Particular mill-owners determine the conditions under which hundreds or thousands of persons work. Some one must take the lead. If the Christian employer will not take it, who will? We are not talking socialism or any such thing. The simple fact is that when one man controls the material conditions under which a hundred men work for their daily bread, he must see to it that their full share of the bread is on their own Christmas tables and not on his. To be sure, in individual cases employers may be themselves the victims of circumstances, but the Christian employer will not be content to be the victim of circumstances for long.

It is conceivable that some man, giving

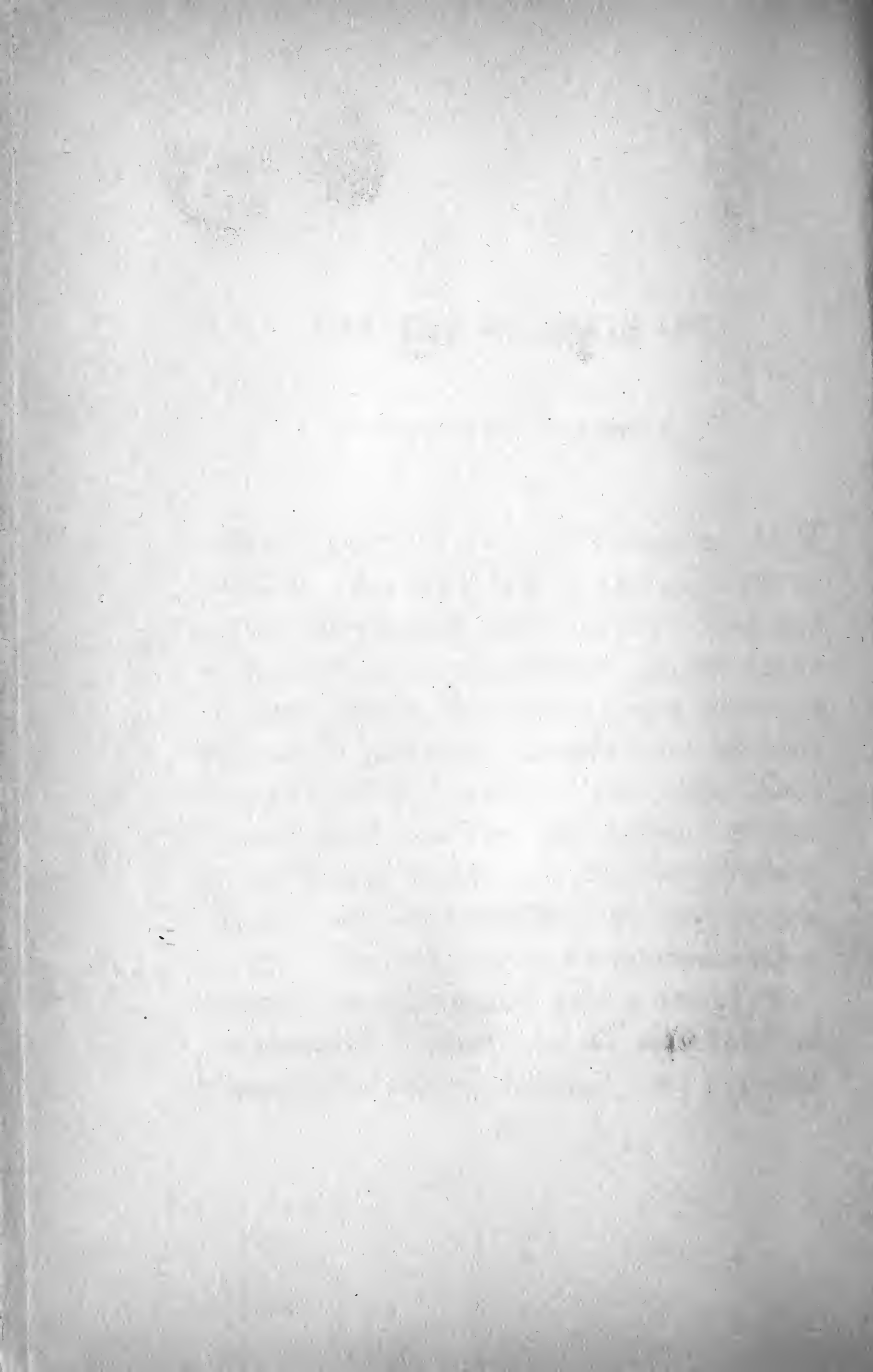
himself to reflections like these, may conclude that it is his duty to do something in the way of "social relief." He will make a Christmas contribution to a charity fund or to an institutional Church. These things are all right in their way, but they will not reach the difficulties. In the place of the charity fund we need an attitude on the part of employers which will do something to make charity funds less necessary. In addition to institutional Churches we need industrial leaders in the strictly residence-community Churches who will welcome a social message of a reasonable kind. By reasonable kind we mean one which does not advocate radical social reconstruction on the one hand, or merely remedial expedients like charity funds on the other. It means, rather, a willingness to correct faults which all admit to exist in present conditions. The tenement house can be made clean. The mill-hands can be given every reasonable chance for safety. The general responsibility of the possession of power

and wealth can be urged. We do not hold this or that individual Christian responsible for conditions over which he has no control. He may not be called upon to head a social revolution, but he is certainly called upon to make the most normal and humane and brotherly use of the power which has come into his hand.

What is the final conclusion, then, of this rather disconnected series of reflections? Just an enforcement of the truth that since the coming of Christ all good things are sacred with a new value. In other parts of this book we have emphasized Christmas day as the time for the ennoblement and adornment of affection by precious gifts which set forth the rare value of our friendship. In all this, however, we must first of all make sure that the money is really our own. Then, even in the spending of the money which is our own we must not forget the general obligation to that social community which makes the earning of the money possible. Nor must

we forget that human and Christ ideal which should rule even in our feasts. Christ Himself was found at the feasts of men. He used parables of banquets to set forth the good news of God. He spoke of the day when men should gather from every direction to sit down at His table. But in all this He kept His thought of His obligation to His own self-respect and to His fellow-men and to His God uppermost.

NO ROOM IN THE INN



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A SERMON TO CHILDREN

Luke ii, 7.

YOU all know the story of which the text of the morning is a part. The ruler of Rome had sent forth an order that all the people of the Roman Empire should be enrolled in a great census. That order set thousands of persons into motion—traveling from the place where they happened to be living at the time back to the ancestral family home. It was necessary for Joseph and Mary to travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem, the ancestral home of the line of David.

It is not a long distance from Nazareth to Bethlehem as we think of distances to-day—not over eighty-five miles at the most;

but people in the time of Joseph and Mary could not travel as fast and as comfortably as we can now. The journey was probably made with Mary on a donkey's back, with Joseph on foot, leading or guiding the donkey. The roads were rough, there was danger of robbers, there was not much chance to get food or rest on the trip. It was a very, very tired man and wife that reached Bethlehem on the evening that was destined to be the first Christmas eve, and when they reached Bethlehem they found every place in the inn taken. Jesus was born that night, and the story tells us that Mary laid the Child in a manger.

The world has always seen something very sad in the words, "There was no room in the inn." But the Bible does not blame any one because there was no room. The people who had places in the inn were not bad people. They were just about such people as would be likely to be at a country inn to-day if there could be anything like the order of

an Emperor to send large numbers traveling into the country districts. Nobody was moved by spite against Joseph and Mary. Still we read the story and we say, "Too bad! Too bad!" Too bad that some one did not notice that Mary was very tired and did not take the manger that she might have his place. Too bad that all the people who had places in the inn missed the chance of preparing a place for the coming of Jesus. Some man's name ought to have been mentioned in this story as one who moved out of his place that Mary might be in comfort. A dozen men ought to have been willing to give Mary a place. It would have taken only a little spirit of kindliness to have done this slight service for Mary and the coming Jesus. How did it happen that nobody came forward to offer Mary a place?

Suppose we call up in fancy some of the travelers who stopped at the inn on that night of the long ago. Suppose we could call them back and question them—what would they

say? Let us listen to some things that some of them would say.

One man steps before us and pleads that he did not know any better. He had one of the good places in the inn. He saw Joseph and Mary pass by the fire in the center of the inn courtyard, but he did not think of such a thing as offering his place. This man says that his mother tried to train him to be polite when he was a boy, to have consideration for others, and to offer his place to one who needed it worse than he did, but he could not see the use of politeness when he was a boy. It seemed silly to him even to make a bow to an elderly man. So this boy grew up with no knowledge of the meaning of the most ordinary politeness. He says now, as he stands before us in fancy, that if he could have only known that a lack of politeness would make him miss the chance of offering his place in the inn for the birthplace of the King of kings, he would have studied politeness with all his mind. But he

did not know. So he grew up with no training in consideration for others and he missed his chance. If we could see this man's mother, wherever she is in the other world, we should probably see her looking with reproachful eyes upon the son who would not be polite because he could not see "any sense in politeness."

—2.

We call another man out of the past. He, too, was in the inn on the night that Joseph and Mary entered. He declares, though, that he did not see them come in. Now, of course there were some who could not see—some who had gone to bed or were busy in another part. This man was sitting in full view of Joseph and Mary as they came in. They almost stumbled over his feet as they passed between him and the fire on their way to the part reserved for animals. Yet he says that he did not see them—and he is telling the truth. He did not see them. He is—or was then—one of those men who when their own needs are met do not see the needs

of any one else. He had come early to the inn and had settled himself comfortably for the night. Of course he knew that there were other people coming in, but he never thought of asking himself if any of these others needed room more than he needed it himself. The boy who never thinks whether other people have Christmas presents or not if he himself has all he wants is just the kind of boy who will make the kind of man we are talking about. He would be greatly surprised if he were told of his lack of consideration for others. In some ways he is polite enough, but the trouble with him is that when he himself is satisfied he thinks that everybody else is satisfied too. He is gentleman enough to lift his hat to a lady or to an elderly man, but not gentleman enough to be on the lookout for a chance to help some one in need. He would have said in surprise, at the suggestion that he give up his place to Joseph and Mary, that he would have to sit up all night! He could have afforded to sit

up one night to have heard the first cry of the Christ-child.

There was another in the inn who did not see. His trouble was not that he was self-centered. He was really very generous. As soon as he saw a chance to do good, he was eager to do good. The trouble was that he just didn't see. He was not quick enough. He, too, was near the fire as Joseph and Mary passed by. He saw them, in a way, but he did not think of offering his place to them till he got home the next day. A man of good impulses, but not quite quick enough. Of course we all know that if we are going to succeed when we grow up and go into business, or become lawyers or doctors, we must be very quick to see chances. Most of us can see the chance after it has passed by. We can think of the kindly act we ought to have done after the chance for doing the act has passed. We excuse ourselves by saying that we didn't think—but we are here to think. It must have been

rather a bitter memory to this man to think of the good he might have done if he had just seen. But he didn't see. He had not been trained to see. He wished to do good, but he was not on the lookout for chances to do good. And so he did not think of offering his place to Joseph and Mary until the next day, and then it was too late.

There is still another man before us as we think of those who staid at the inn that night. We trust that this man has been in a world where he has learned better since, but at the time this man said, "First come, first served." He saw Joseph and Mary come in, and was really very sorry for them, but it was not his fault that they were late at the inn. "It was too bad for Mary to be worn and tired with the journey, but they really ought to have started sooner, or they ought not to have tried to travel so far in one day, or they ought to have prodded the donkey along a little faster. Anyhow it would be impossible to keep inns on any other

plan than first come, first served. That is the only way to be fair to everybody. When people are traveling they must expect to have to put up with some inconveniences.”

When we try to urge upon this man the thought of the opportunity he lost through not making way for Joseph and Mary, he talks to us again about first come, first served. He says that this is the only rule by which we can get along. He tells us that while the Golden Rule is good, it is not to be taken “literally,” as he calls it, by which he is apt to mean that the Rule is not to be taken as if it meant what it says, but as if it meant what it does not say. He may even say things that seem to him very funny about what would happen if everybody waited for everybody else, and if everybody gave up to everybody else. But all such talk misses the point. The Golden Rule would have us treat others as ourselves and in cases of unusual need render unto others the good that at such times we should like to have given to our-

selves. There is something wrong with first come, first served, when it allows a strong, healthy man to sleep in comfort while Mary goes to the manger.

We must not make our list too long, but we ought to hear at least one more man. This man tells us that he saw Joseph and Mary come into the inn and that he intended to give his place to them. While he was thinking about it, though, they passed on. He could not get Joseph and Mary out of his mind, but after he had failed to speak to them on first seeing them, he felt ashamed to hunt them up. As it was, they were on his mind all night. He felt once or twice that he must get up, even in the middle of the night, and let them have his place. But he did n't. He pulled his blanket around his shoulders and fell into a doze.

Now, why do we talk in this way about all these people? Just because the persons did what we would probably have done if we had been in their place. For many of

us, day after day, act just as they did. To be sure, we do not have the chance to aid Christ as did these travelers who stopped on the first Christmas eve at the inn, but Christ has told us that He is before us when one of His children anywhere is in need. And Christian parents have trained us to manners of consideration for others, not merely to have us appear better at dinners and parties, but to put us on the way of rendering Christ service. We do not say that those travelers in the inn at Bethlehem were wicked; we do not say that they wished to have the newborn Christ laid in a manger. We simply say that they were thoughtless or that they were thinking only of themselves.

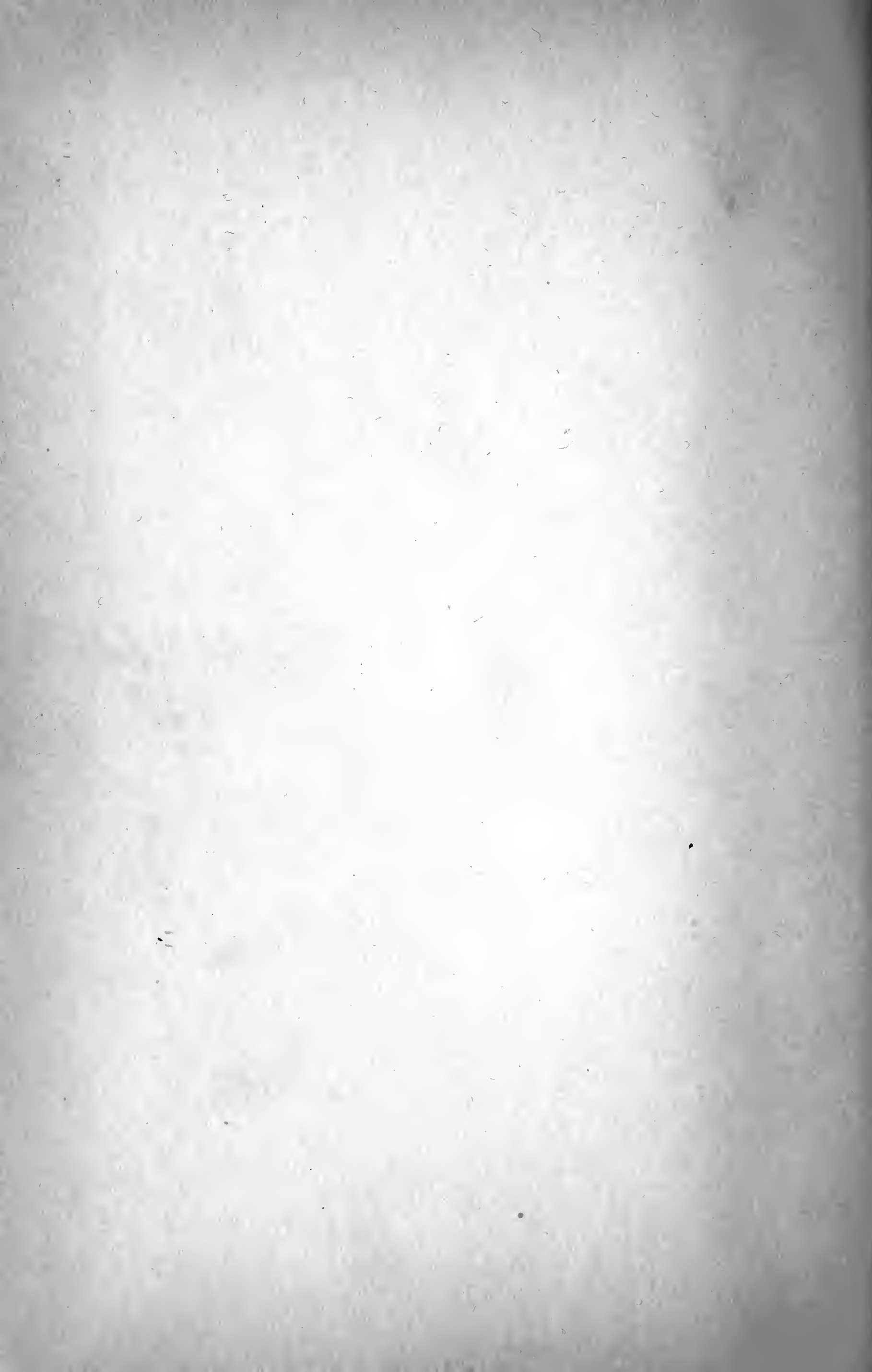
If we could call back together all these different persons we have mentioned—all who might have made a place for Christ but did not—there is one thing they would all alike say: that if they had known that Christ was to come to the inn that night they would have been glad to make a place for Him, but they

did not know. We sometimes make the same excuse, but we can not make it with the same right that the travelers in the inn did. For since Christ has spoken His truth to us, we *know* that every time one in real need stands before us Christ stands before us.

There is something more. Christ comes to us, not only in the form of those in distress or need, but He comes to us in promptings to do right—those inner promptings that no one may know of except ourselves. Our lives, after all, may be spoken of as ✓ Bethlehem inns, where Christ may be born. The little promptings to do right are the coming of Christ. But what if all the room is taken? If we are thoughtless or careless or interested merely in our own pleasures, some of these strivings toward the better life have no place to stay in our hearts. Let us remember that Christ was kept out of the inn, not because the people in the inn did not like Him or because they were trying to keep Him out. He was kept out because

the places were all taken. If I want to have my own way, that takes a room. If I am interested just in myself, that takes a room—maybe all the rooms. Every time I fill up the rooms in this way and keep out the good impulses, I am making what happened in the olden time to happen again. There is no room for Christ in the inn. And our lives are really more than inns. They are dwelling-houses. Christ comes not to stay over night, but to stay all the time. He comes to live with us. But He can not stay with us unless He can get in. And He can not get in if there is no room. And there can not be room unless we make room. We can make room if we will. It need never be said of our lives that they had no room for Christ. . .







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